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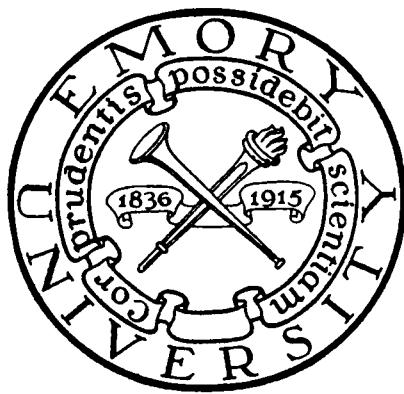
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DEDICATION.



MY DEAR MRS STIRLING,—

As “good wine needs no bush,” so a good and great name like yours needs no further honouring; but I have long wished to put yours where I, honouring it in the world’s sight, might honour literature and myself. I have therefore ventured to inscribe it here, with the sympathy which all who know you well must feel, and with the gratitude which I, more than most, owe to a generous friend and a

wise teacher. When I first tried to lisp in that beautiful Art wherein you spoke and speak so beautifully and so eloquently, you assisted me with your counsel, your encouragement, and your generous approbation. Among the rich memories and tokens of a gracious fame that will certainly not die so long as the Drama has a history, try to find a place for this Dedication—a pledge, not only of my sincere homage to a great artiste, but of my warm affection for a brave and true-hearted woman.

Believe me,

Very sincerely yours,

HARRIETT JAY

To MRS FANNY STIRLING.



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TWO MEN AND A MAID.

CHAPTER I.

THE SEA SANDS—LOVERS' FOOTPRINTS.

IT had been a very unpleasant morning. Seated in the high-backed vicarage pew, with her lover beside her, Alice Chepstow had been alternately listening to the patterning of the rain, and watching for stray gleams of sunshine which crept through the diamond panes of the church windows, and trembled across the floor.

There had been a hard battle between rain and sunshine, and, for a time at least, it had seemed that the rain would win, for though the showers were not of long duration, they were possessed of remarkable earnestness and strength. But when the last hymn and the last benediction were over, and the congregation streamed forth into the open air, the sun was shining as brightly as if his rule had never been interfered with, and the only tokens left by the rain were white wreaths of steam, clinging about the peaks of the highest hills, and floating in light clouds across the sea,

Alice Chepstow was glad of the change; with the light-loving instinct of delicately nurtured damsels, she disliked damp weather. During that morning the sound of the rain, pattering persistently upon the slated roof of the half-empty church, had rendered her deaf to every word which her father said. How could she possibly think of the sermon, when her brain was so busy trying to settle the momentous question, whether, when the service was over, she should slip quietly into the vicarage, there to wait until the storm had ceased; or, boldly facing the elements, walk straight down to the shore, and, taking shelter in some sequestered nook, enjoy there the two hours' conversation with her lover, which every Sunday morning was her due?

Alice was the one representative of her house at church that day. Her sister, the only other member of the family at the vicarage,—the eldest daughter,—upon whom the duties of the dead mother had devolved; who had to help her father in his parish work; to look after the welfare of her younger sister, and take upon herself all the troubles of home,—toiled so hard during the week, that she sometimes remained at home merely to rest on Sunday.

But with Alice it was so different. During the week she had nothing whatever to do. To her the Sunday service was a kind of recreation to be looked forward to with pleasure, and enjoyed when it came. Regularly every Sunday, therefore, in answer to the ringing of the church bell, she started on her way, sat demurely in her pew during the service, and enjoyed a walk with her lover when the service came to an end.

Rumour, which never pauses before a pretty face, did

not pass lightly by Alice Chepstow. It was averred, and pretty openly too, that there had been a time when Alice, although the clergyman's daughter, had been by no means a perfect devotee ; that during the time of her other lovers, she had been content to spend her Sundays in the vicarage garden too, or to roam along the silent sea-shore while the church bell was ringing or the villagers were at prayer. But times were different now, Richard Glamorgan had returned from his appointment in India with a fair amount of youth still left to him, and had asked Alice Chepstow to become his wife. And though the man was almost double her age, was not at all good-looking, and was of a very morose temper, she had accepted him and his fortune, and for some mysterious reason had rigorously espoused piety too. Of course the immediate cry was that, at the bidding of Richard Glamorgan, Alice Chepstow had ruthlessly broken with all her lovers, and, merely because he was the heir of Plas Ruthven, had gleefully consented to marry him. Of course the report reached the embryo husband's ears, and there the memory of it lingered longer than he cared to say.

When Alice had sat in church that morning, listening to the patterning of the rain, her lover had been beside her ; when she came out with the congregation he was before her, pushing the people to the right about, and leaving her path clear. When at length she gained the threshold, and stood eagerly drinking in the fresh breeze, he took her hand upon his arm, and the two walked away from the church and took the path which led towards the sea.

How bright the day had grown after the heavy storms

of rain! The mist still clung about the hill-tops, and the grass and heather were still dank with dew, but the sun was shining its brightest, the larks were carolling overhead, and far away, out of the shelter of the Plas Ruthven woods, Alice could hear the faint cry of the cuckoo. The sky was of a bright azure blue,—cloudless, and throbbing with heat and light. The sea was like a mirror—not a ripple to be seen anywhere; its glassy surface bright with reflected brightness from the sky.

“What a gorgeous day,” said Alice quietly. “Now that the sun is shining, and everything looks so bright, it seems difficult to believe that very little more than an hour ago the rain was falling so heavily. I am afraid,” she continued, running glibly on, “that during the service this morning I was dreadfully profane. I could not give my mind to the sermon; every time the rain came down, I had a vision of you and myself sitting disconsolately in the vicarage, unable to talk and enjoy ourselves because of papa and Marion.”

She paused, but got no answer. She was not surprised at this. Her companion was evidently in a dreamy mood, more eager to drink in the beauty and quietness of the surrounding scene than to descant upon it; and Alice, falling in with his whim, walked silently along by his side. When they reached the shore, she took her seat upon the shingle, while her companion placed himself close by.

The tide had ebbed a little, just enough to leave uncovered a little strip of sand, still damp and darkened from the touch of the outgoing tide. Alice, who had seated herself close to the edge of the shingle, began to amuse herself by throwing shells and pebbles into the smooth sea. So interested did she become in this pastime, that

she seemed to forget for the moment the very existence of her companion.

She was recalled to herself by the keen scrutiny of his eyes. They were fixed upon her with a look that startled her. For a moment she returned the look in amazed silence, then she opened her lips to speak. Before she could do so, her companion had bent forward and taken both her hands.

“Alice,” he said quickly, “I wonder if you *do* love me? I wonder if you love me better than any living creature on this earth?”

For a moment Alice stared on; then she sighed, as if relieved from a spell, and broke into a laugh.

“Do I love you?” she said. “Do I love you? If I did not, why then should I have said ‘yes’ when you asked me to become your wife?”

C H A P T E R I I.

A L O V E R S' Q U A R R E L.

“We quarrelled this morning, my lover and I,
We were out of temper and scarce knew why,
Though the cause was trivial—common.”

“It is very strange,” continued the girl, fixing her eyes earnestly upon her companion’s face; “but during the last month you have asked me that question twelve times at least. Do I love you? I thought I had answered when I consented to marry you and to spend with you the remainder of my life.”

He smiled very grimly as he returned the girl's earnest look.

"You thought so," he said, "and yet, Alice, you have seen quite enough of life to know that nine girls out of ten marry for money, not love."

An indignant flush rose to the girl's cheek, but she answered quietly enough,—

"And you think it is for money, not love, that I am going to marry you?"

"I did not say so"

"No, you do not say so, but I had rather you did, than convey it to me as you do. You have not said you have no faith in my sincerity, my truth, my affection; and yet at times I have seen this in your eyes as plainly as if it had been written there, and once or twice when I have seen this I have thought—"

"Well, Alice, what have you thought?"

"That—that—if your opinion of me is not likely to alter, our married life will not be a very happy one—and that perhaps it might be as well for us to part before it is too late."

She moved slightly from him as she spoke, and turned her face towards the sea.

"So we have come to the root of the matter at last," he said. "You really think it would be better for us to shake hands and say good-bye?"

Alice did not reply. She felt that already she had said too much. When she had uttered those words, she had done so with the view of making peace—not of uplifting between them a greater barrier than ever.

"When two people come together without sufficient trust and without sufficient love," he continued, seeing that she

remained silent, “parting is sure to come sooner or later, and perhaps, as you say, the early parting is the best.”

He rose as he spoke, but the girl remained silent and speechless still. She had dropped her cheek upon her hand and her eyes were fixed upon the sea, but she saw nothing, for they were dim with tears.

Such scenes as these were common between Alice Chepstow and Richard Glamorgan, although their engagement was only two months old. Lovers’ quarrels they called them at home, when, after some lonely walk, Alice returned looking sad and out of heart ; little episodes which came to ruffle the smooth course of love, like storms upon a summer sea. At first the girl herself had regarded them as necessary evils, and had consoled herself with the old adage, that “the course of true love never did run smooth,” but since they had occurred so often, she had come to regard them more seriously, and to wonder if those storms were to continue in a more aggravated form after her marriage.

Did he love her ? If so, why should he continually introduce cause for strife ? and if he did not, why had he asked her to become his wife ? He was not marrying *her* for money, of that she felt very well assured ; for beyond the pin-money of fifty pounds a-year which her grandmother had left her, she had not a penny in the world. He did love her, there was no doubt of it ; and as Alice took this assurance to heart, she felt in a measure relieved.

“ You are very unkind to me,” she said, struggling to repress her tears. “ It is I, not you, who ought to say, ‘ Do you care for me ? ’ ”

“ You think so, Alice ? ”

"I am sure of it. If I doubted you as you doubt me, you would never believe in my affection at all!"

She had risen from her seat, and now stood before him with eager, outstretched hands. It was very peaceful all around them, with the sort of peace which is invariably brought by the shining of the mid-day sun. The cuckoo still told his name to the hills, the larks caroled overhead, and out at sea a flock of seagulls hovered, uttering faint far-away cries. These, and the monotonous washing of the water, were the only sounds to be heard.

"I *did* think," said Alice, biting her quivering lip, "that we should have had a pleasant walk to-day. When we were in church I felt miserable because it rained; I wish now that it had continued to rain. I wish we had had to sit in the vicarage until nightfall. Anything would have been better than quarrelling like this!"

"Whose fault is it that we quarrel?"

"Yours," returned Alice promptly. "You watch me about like a cat watching a mouse; and no matter what I do or say, I am sure to be wrong! Richard, why can you not trust me?" she continued, after an impassioned pause, again turning towards him, and outstretching her trembling hands; "why will you not believe me, once and for all, and set those wicked doubts of yours at rest for ever?"

He stooped towards her, took her face in both his hands, and kissed her quivering lips.

"Alice, my darling," he said quietly, "you do not understand. It is my great love for you that makes me what I am. My life is yours to make or mar just as much as if you were one of the old Fates, and held the scales of my destiny in your little hand."

"Is that so?" she said, raising her smiling eyes to his face; "then your life will be a very happy one—so happy that you will wish you had trusted me from the very first!"

She put her hand through his arm, and they walked away together; Alice leaving a print of tiny footprints behind her—and several jagged marks from the end of her parasol. Now that she believed the storm was over, she was quite content, little dreaming that in less than half-an-hour she would be plunged into still greater disturbances than before.

"In order to punish you for your cruelty to me to-day," she said, looking up into the grave face which was just an inch above her, "I shall make you take me tomorrow over to Glen Ruthven. We will dip into the magic pool and see if we are to have any more quarrels. Shall we?"

He smiled down upon her.

"If you wish it, Alice, but I warn you that I am not superstitious, and that I have no faith in the fortunetelling powers of water or any other element. I hope you have none?"

"Well," returned Alice earnestly, "I do not know—certainly I never did believe the strange tales until I dipped into it with Philip Kingston, and—and—"

She paused, blushed painfully, then turned white and frightened. What had happened? Nothing apparently. They were still walking amicably side by side, she looking up, he looking down, still with the same grave, quiet expression in his eyes. But though no change was apparent, Alice felt that the whole soul of her companion had suddenly arisen in tumult.

"Who is Philip Kingston?" he asked presently, seeing that she remained silent.

Alice turned away her head.

"Philip Kingston is Philip Kingston," she replied, in as light a tone as she could assume. "He was brought up here, but he left about six months ago, and I hear he is studying in Rome!"

"Why did he go away, Alice?"

"I should imagine," returned the girl, gazing around her with a strange forced smile, "because he did not find his artistic talents sufficiently appreciated in the wilds of Wales."

Silence again,—not even the sound of the measured footsteps on the sand. The sun was shining more brightly than ever, but Alice felt quite cold and sick at heart.

"How chilly it is getting," she said presently; "this is a very changeable day!"

"It is not cold, Alice. It is hotter than it has been all day, and the sun is shining upon you brightly enough to give you sunstroke. Put up your parasol!"

The girl obeyed his orders, withdrawing her hand from his arm to do so. When the parasol was up—its handle resting upon her left shoulder, its lace wafting a refreshing breeze about her head and face—she summoned up sufficient courage to raise her eyes.

"Shall I shelter you? The sun is shining full upon your head!"

"I have been in India, and am used to it!"

Silence again. The two were walking apart by this time. Alice had not been asked to replace her hand upon her companion's arm, and she had not chosen

to do so without an invitation. Thus they walked on for fully ten minutes ; then the man spoke again.

“ Alice ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Did this man—this Mr Kingston—paint the portrait of you that hangs in your father’s dining-room ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ And did he not give you your dog ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Anything else ? ”

“ Yes, a ring, the one with the blue stones in it.”

Silence again, broken this time by the girl.

“ Philip Kingston was always very friendly with us,” she said. “ Are you angry that he should have given me those things ? ”

“ No ; it was natural. I have nothing whatever to say against *him* ! ”

“ Only against me ! You are very unjust. I could not help his caring for me ! ”

“ You could help telling me a lie about it.”

“ I have told you no lie ! ” returned the girl, flashing up into real anger at last.

“ Dissimulation is another name for lying. You intended to make me believe that you and this man were nothing to each other, whereas you were engaged to him, I suppose ? ”

“ I was never engaged to Philip Kingston in my life,” returned Alice quickly.

“ Then why did you dabble your hands together in the Devil’s Pool at Glen Ruthven ? ”

“ He was very fond of me,” quietly returned the girl, “ and he wanted me to marry him, but I felt I

could not care for him enough, and I told him so ; yet he urged me so much to try to like him, that at last I consented. I promised to think of no one but him for one month, and if at the end of the month I still felt I could not marry him, he said he would trouble me no more. I refused to be regularly engaged, but he pressed me to take the ring ; so I did take it."

" Well ? "

" We were a good deal together during that month. He took my portrait and gave me my dog Oscar. One day we all went a picnic to Glen Ruthven, and that was the day we dipped our hands in the basin for fun. A week from that day he asked me finally if I would marry him, and I said ' No.' I offered him back the ring and Oscar, but he would not take either. He said he did not care for dogs, and as he was going away, and we might never meet again, would I do him the favour of wearing his ring."

" And you do wear it ! I have seen it on your finger."

" Yes, I have worn it ever since. It is only a memento of an old friend. If you wish it, I will take it off."

" You will do nothing of the kind," he said abruptly.
" Good-bye."

Without another word or look he left her.

CHAPTER III.

PEEPS INTO THE PAST.

HE left her standing before a little green gate, which was half smothered in a hawthorn hedge. Behind the hedge nestled the vicarage, Alice Chepstow's home. A cottage looking like a Swiss chalet, a rambling, uneven, three-cornered place, with every vestige of its wall hidden behind a profusion of ivy, and some strange wild creeping plant which bore bright red berries all the year round. Behind it the hills rose, and before it was expanded the open sea.

Alice did not look at either—her eyes were steadily fixed upon the man who was walking rapidly away. Would he turn? No—there was no sign of it. The head was resolutely set upon the shoulders; the step was decided and very firm; he moved steadily forward until he passed round a turn in the road and disappeared.

Alice watched, and as she did so she felt a lump rise in her throat which almost choked her, and all the prospect began to swim before her eyes. She felt impelled to call to him: had she done so her voice would not have reached him: it would have died away amidst the silence of the shore.

“Alice, do not linger. You are late already, dear—the dinner is almost served!”

Alice did not look up: had she done so she would have seen her sister—who, having run upstairs to prepare herself for dinner, had seen the lovers separate at the gate.

"Come in, child," continued Marion Chepstow, leaning still further out of the window. "Solitary walks and loving speeches may be very satisfying, perhaps they are, but remember papa and I have had neither—we are very hungry, and the dinner is quite done!"

"I am coming, Marion!"

And Alice, her throat still swollen, her eyes still dim, turned, pushed open the gate, and passed through. She entered the house unperceived, ran quickly up to her room, and hastily casting off her hat, jacket, and gloves—stood irresolute at her door when the dinner-bell chimed loudly through the house. To Alice the sound was not welcome. She felt sick and dispirited, and she had much ado to keep the tears from her eyes. But she knew she must go down; if she absented herself from the dinner-table, the cross-questionings of her father and sister would be sure to drag from her the account of that morning's adventure, and Alice had very strong reasons for wishing that it should not be brought to light. So she quietly descended the stairs and entered the dining-room, just as the last sound of the bell had ceased. Her father and sister had both taken their seats—without a word to either, she took hers.

It was very cool and refreshing here—much more so than it had been out on the sands or in the church that morning, and Alice, folding her delicate hands on the snowy cloth before her, and turning her face towards the window, felt that the peace and coolness of the room were already acting as a sedative to still her throbbing nerves. The window was thrown wide open, and the breeze, which was wafted down from the hill-tops, and crept into the room to touch the

faces of those within, brought with it the sweet subtle scent of flowers. Though Alice had come down to join in the meal, she had not been able to trust herself to speak, but, save by her sister, her silence had not been observed. Mr Chepstow, noted in the village for his strange dreaminess and absence of mind, was thinking more of his sermon than the dinner or company; but Marion, looking up quickly when her sister entered the room, saw the quivering lips, the heaving breast, the tear-dimmed, downcast eye. She checked the bantering words which were upon her tongue, and, turning to the table, proceeded to eat her dinner in silence. But when, the moment the last course was disposed of, Alice rose and made for the door, Marion also pushed back her chair as if she too were about to depart; at this Mr Chepstow awakened from his dream, and assuming that they were about to prepare to accompany him on his Sunday visiting, told them to hasten, in order that the first part of the walk might be accomplished while the sun was still high.

Alice paused, gazed over her father's head, with an appealing look at her sister, then hastily quitted the room.

"Alice has a headache, papa," said Marion, in explanation. "We shall have to wait a little," and, having seen to her father's comforts, she hurried upstairs to find out if possible the real cause of her sister's trouble.

She found Alice seated on her bedroom floor, her face buried in the white counterpane, her whole body convulsed with sobs. Marion knelt down beside her, stroked her hair, patted her head, and tried to soothe her into more tranquil sorrow,

"Alice, do not cry so; tell me, dear, what is the meaning of all this?"

As soon as the violence of her grief had somewhat abated, Alice laid her head on her sister's shoulder, and cried quietly there.

"We have quarrelled again, Marion—that's all."

The elder girl buried her delicate fingers amidst the soft tresses of her sister's hair.

"The old story," she returned gently. "Alice, my pet, have you quarrelled for the last time? Have you really summoned up courage to-day to break off your engagement with Richard Glamorgan?"

Alice raised her head, passed her handkerchief over her burning cheeks, and gazed at her sister with wondering, tearful eyes.

"Broken off our engagement!" she exclaimed. "No, Marion; it's not quite so bad as that. He will be sure to come round in the end; but indeed he is too hard upon me!"

For a moment Marion sat silent; she was disappointed, and, indeed, as angry as it was possible for her to be. Only another lovers' quarrel! And she had hoped—earnestly hoped when she had looked that day upon her sister's pale face and quivering lips, that the engagement which had brought with it so much sorrow and very little gladness, had at length come to an end. In Marion's opinion the engagement had been a mistake altogether. It was incongruous, she thought, that Alice, who, all her life, had been the spoilt pet of every one, and who had received plenty of suitable offers of marriage, should at length fall to the share of a gloomy misanthrope—almost a misogynist, who loved her with the cruel earnestness of

a tiger, and seemed determined to wear her young life away in savage quarrels and disputes.

"Alice," she said quietly, "if you have not already broken with Richard, take my advice, and do so now. It will be a wrench at first, no doubt, for you have set your foolish little heart upon him so much ; but believe me, my darling, it will save you many years of weary sorrow. He is not the man for you, Alice ! if you marry him ; he will break your heart, and hurry you to an early grave."

Alice did not reply. She had replaced her head on her sister's shoulder, and was crying quietly again, holding her handkerchief over her mouth to stifle the sound of her broken hysterical sobs. Marion placed her arm around her sister's waist, and quietly spoke on,—

" You do not know Richard as I know him, Alice, or perhaps you would not love him quite so much. You were in France when he came home to spend a few weeks at Plas Ruthven before going to India ; but I was here, and I saw him very often indeed. They told strange stories about him in the village. Some said he was brutally unkind to dumb animals ; some, that he was kind, self-sacrificing, and good. I did not believe much in either, for I know what stories our villagers can tell ; but one day I had an opportunity of judging for myself. I was coming home from the village, when I suddenly came upon Richard walking with his dog along the shoulder of Glen Heather Hill. He was training the dog, and, as the afternoon was fine, and I was not in a hurry, I sat down on the heather to watch what was going on. Richard was a manly-looking young fellow in those days, Alice,—tall and straight as a dart, with a fine, hand-

some open face, and the loveliest black eyes I have ever seen. As I looked at him, I found myself disbelieving every one of the unpleasant stories I had heard. There was no vice in him, I said to myself, and all the stories I had heard were but malignant inventions to bring him into discredit amongst his own people. He was so fond of the dog, too, which gambolled at his side, fixing its gentle eyes upon him, and obeying every wave of his hand."

Alice sighed, and raised her aching head.

"I always knew he was kind—I told you so, Marion, and now you acknowledge it yourself."

Marion smiled sadly as she looked into her sister's tear-stained face. She took the trembling hands between her own, and stroked them gently.

"Will you listen a little longer, Alice?" she said very softly. "I do not wish to pain you, darling—your happiness is very dear to me. It is in order to try and spare you years of pain that I tell you this story now. Well, I watched this lover of yours—watched him with delight, admiration, and a certain sense of shame—delight and admiration for his beauty, shame at myself for having been made to believe that he was brutal and a coward. Had I risen and walked home at once, I should always have admired that man; but, my dear, I sat on."

"Yes, Marion."

Alice's tears were not flowing now; she was taking too intense an interest in her sister's story. Her red tear-stained cheeks had turned white, her folded hands were white and trembling too; she uttered the "Yes, Marion," in a hushed kind of eager voice as if she feared, yet longed, to draw forth the end of the story.

And Marion spoke on, not looking at the pale, wistful, beautiful face, not touching now the cold trembling hands lest her courage, already shaken, might altogether fail.

"Well, dear, just as I was about to rise and walk on, the dog became possessed of a stubborn fit; a contest ensued between him and his master, and I waited to see the result. For a long time Richard was patient; he tried caresses and punishment, all to no purpose, the dog held the mastery, when suddenly I heard a savage cry, and the next moment the butt end of the gun was uplifted and fell, striking the poor animal motionless at his master's feet!"

"Dead?"

"So I thought. The blow which had killed the poor creature seemed to have stunned me. I sat trembling and cold, utterly unable to move or speak, with my eyes fixed upon the dog which lay prostrate on the hill. Suddenly I saw the head raised. I ran forward, and was just in time to see the poor creature raise a pair of gentle, reproachful eyes to the face of his master, and after bestowing a caress upon the hand which had dealt its death-blow, fall back and breathe its last at Richard's feet! I looked at him—how his face had changed! His lips were livid, his teeth close set, a profuse perspiration had broken out upon his forehead. We regarded each other for a few moments in silence, then, when the strange faintness and sickness which had come upon me in a measure passed off, I opened my lips to speak. 'Mr Glamorgan,' I said, 'you are a brutal coward! I would not give you a dog for all the world!' Would you believe it, Alice, he laughed,—with that poor dumb creature, a sacrifice to his evil

passions, lying dead at his feet. ‘Of course,’ said he, pointing to the dog, ‘all your sympathies are centred there, and yet, Miss Chepstow, incredible as it may seem to you, I am the most to be pitied of us two to-day! That was my favourite dog!’ I could not answer him; sick and disgusted I turned away and left him with his dead dog alone. I afterwards learned that he carried the body home, had it buried as carefully as if it had been a child, and placed above its grave a small white marble stone!’

Marion paused, but Alice said nothing. She had risen from her seat upon the floor and walked over to the open window, and stood now with folded arms upon the sill, and face bent forward as if for air. She was white and cold, and trembling violently, as if the warm breath of summer, which crept in from the hills and the sunlit ocean, struck a chill to her heart. Marion walked over to the window too, and folded her arms around her sister’s trembling form.

“ You can understand now, dear,” she continued softly, “ why it was I uttered that sharp little cry of pain when you came home to us that afternoon after your long walk on the hills, and told us with such a contented smile that you were to be Richard Glamorgan’s wife. You thought I was jealous, dear ; I saw the suspicion in your eyes : but I did not mind it, for I knew you were altogether wrong. My only thought, my only fear, was that if you married Richard you would be espousing pain and sorrow, and perhaps an early death ! ”

“ And yet you did not speak, Marion ? ”

“ Because I thought, after the first shock of the announcement was over, ‘ Perhaps by this time he is changed ! ’ ”

"And so he is changed," returned Alice quickly. "I know he has not led a spotless life; but then who has? And because he possessed a bad temper and did some cruel things in his youth, that is no reason why they should be brought against him now! If that was always done—if certain little things could not be forgotten, I wonder how many of us would escape blame? I should not, for one," concluded Alice, making a weary attempt at a smile. "If I had always been as I am now, Richard and I would not quarrel quite so much as we do."

"You have been very bad, Alice," said Marion quietly, smiling in spite of herself.

"Well, not exactly *bad*," returned Alice; "but I have been foolish at times, and done things of which Richard does not approve. I have been too fond of admiration, and have had too many stupid little love affairs to please him!"

"That is all in the past."

"Of course it is, but then he will rake up the past, and so we quarrel. I do not like him to do it, Marion, and what I do not like in him, I will not do."

For a time the two girls were silent, Alice still with her arms upon the window-sill, her pale face turned towards the sea. Marion bent towards her and whispered softly,—

"Alice, suppose you heard that this man was not changed; that his character is still notorious; that there are other things, well known to all but you, which—"

Alice shuddered, turned her pale face towards her sister, and looked at her with eyes full of pitiful entreaty.

"Don't you think we have had enough, Marion, just for one day?" she said.

Marion paused, irresolute now, her firmness utterly shaken ; she had wounded her sister to no purpose already, should she withhold the one final stab, which might be her salvation.

“Alice,” she said, “do you remember the story which I told you the other day about the man who tried to kill the woman he loved because he thought she had deceived him ? The hero of that story was Richard Glamorgan too !”

Silence again, then Alice turned and fixed her eyes upon the sea.

“There is papa calling,” she said wearily. “I think, Marion, as I have a headache, you two had better go to the village without me to-day.”

C H A P T E R I V

“WAS IT A VISION, OR A WAKING DREAM ?”

MARION remained silent for a moment. Then she asked,—

“And you, Alice ?”

“I shall stay here. Say to papa that I have a headache, with walking too far along the sands to-day.”

Alice again turned her face to the open window, while Marion prepared to do as her sister commanded her. Where was the use of further lingering, further protestation, the infliction of further pain ? At that moment Marion would have given worlds to recall what she had already said, to withdraw all the poisoned darts

which during that afternoon she had been plunging in her sister's heart. Since the words had been useless, it would have been better to have left them unsaid ; but since the past could not be recalled, Marion determined to try and do better in future. So because Alice wished it, she put on her bonnet to go to the village, secretly determining to do all in her power to prevent the lovers' quarrel of that day from becoming known.

On descending the stairs she found her father waiting for her—eager to be gone, and anxious in his inquiries for Alice.

"Alice has a headache, she cannot go with us to-day, papa," said Marion quietly ; then she allayed all her father's anxiety, and led him away, leaving Alice still shut up in her room, and the servant, who had been left at home to take special care of her comfortably at tea in the kitchen.

There had been a good deal of delay that afternoon, so by the time they were on the high road to the village, the best part of the day had gone, the sun was sinking quickly in the west, its bright beams ever growing fainter. As the front door shut with a bang, Alice's heart gave a flutter of delight and she bent eagerly forward to watch the figures as they went up the hill. All Marion's efforts seemed to be concentrated in urging her father forward and preventing him from looking up at the little window where Alice's face was to be seen. They walked steadily forward, never once looking back, and Alice, watching with saddened tear-dimmed eyes, saw them disappear round a turn in the road. Then she rose with a sigh, and went wearily downstairs again.

The house was very quiet now. Alice shut herself in the dining-room, opened the window, pulled down the sun-blind ; and throwing herself wearily into an easy-chair, again drank in the balmy breath of the afternoon air. Her eyes were sadly regarding the portrait which Philip Kingston had painted, and which hung on the wall right before her face—her thoughts were carrying her back over a period of years. How long she sat she did not know,—she was aroused from her reverie by the fiery scrutiny of a pair of eyes. The eyes of her lover, who stood outside the window quietly regarding her !

He had entered stealthily by the side entrance of the garden, taken his stand upon the lawn, and quietly watched the girl as she sat ruminating upon the past, and gazing with saddened tear-dimmed eyes upon her own face. While she remained quietly seated, he had kept back ; but when she rose and looked into his eyes, he opened the glass-door and entered the room.

“Alice ?”

The girl did not answer ; after the first start of surprise was over, she resolutely quelled the troubled beating of her heart and turned her head away. The memory of that morning’s interview was still fresh within her—as fresh almost as the story which her sister had told ; and although, if he had kept away, she would have been very much inclined to try to forget, she felt by no means so forgiving, now that he was the first to hold out the flag of truce. So when he stretched forth his hands, she quietly eluded his grasp, and asked for what purpose he had come there that night.

"To make peace," he said.

"And how long is the peace to last?" returned the girl quietly. "Until to-morrow?"

"Say rather all our lives!"

Alice laughed petulantly.

"That is so likely, is it not?" she said. "Do you know it is just six months since I first met you, just two since we became engaged, and yet already our quarrels have become a by-word at home. If, after a walk with you, I return with no signs of pain upon my face, everybody is astonished; if, on the contrary, my face is swollen with crying, they seem to accept it as the natural state of things, and pay no heed!"

She paused as if for an answer, but none came. He had turned his back upon her now, and stood with his hands thrust deep in his pockets—his tall, broad, muscular form filling up the window and darkening the room; while from her distant corner the girl gazed upon him in saddened silence.

"We have spent a pleasant Sunday," she continued, in a tone made more irritable by the silence of her companion; "and all on account of this picture and this ring. Well, whether or not we quarrel in future, the cause of our quarrel to-day shall not remain!"

So saying, she pulled the ring from her finger and tossed it out of the window into the garden; then lifting down the picture from the wall, she took up a penknife and slit the canvas from top to bottom.

Then she looked up and caught her companion's eye.

He had merely turned round. He stood now with his back, instead of his face, to the window, his hands still thrust in his pockets, his eyes fixed with a strange,

sad look upon her face. For a time they regarded each other in silence, then the girl sank down upon the floor in a passionate flood of tears. Still Richard Glamorgan said nothing, but over his face there passed a dark troubled look. He passed out through the window, stepped down into the garden, and picked up Alice's ring. It had had a hard fall on the gravel, and some of the blue stones were gone, but, damaged as it was, he carried it into the room again.

"Alice," he said quietly, "here is your ring!"

He knelt down on the carpet before her and stretched forth his right hand, holding the frail little loop of gold between his thumb and finger. The girl raised for a moment her tear-dimmed eyes.

"It is broken," she said, then covering her face again, she wept hysterically.

How dark the man's countenance grew! For a moment the whole of his body seemed to tremble like a bough shaken by the wind. He rose to his feet, walked once or twice up and down the room, then paused again before her. Instead of kneeling, he stretched forth his hands, lifted her to her feet, and folded her in his arms.

"Alice," he said, "do not cry so; where is the use of it all? We will be as happy as we can to-night, and to-morrow we will go together to Plas Ruthven, and dip our hands in the Devil's Pool."

Alice had ceased her crying, but she now looked up with wild, frightened eyes.

"Go there!" she said hurriedly. "No, no, we will not do that now!"

"Why, are you afraid?"

"Afraid? Of what?"

"That your love will not stand the test?"

The girl's face clouded in a moment.

"I wonder when you will cease to doubt me," she said. "If I am afraid, as you seem to fancy, do you think I should have proposed that very expedition when we were on the beach to-day? I was not afraid then, and I am not afraid now, but since this morning I have learned to hate the place. It is solely through the mention of that, that we have had such an unpleasant day."

"Yes, it has not been a pleasant day," he said quietly. "You have got a torn picture, a broken ring, and several unpleasant hours to think over." Then bending his head and holding her closer to him, he said, "Kiss me, my darling. We will go to the basin tomorrow, and if our fortune is fair, I will promise before God never to doubt your love again!"

"And if it is not?"

He started, and his face grew troubled—ere he could speak, however, the girl hurriedly answered for him.

"And if it is not," she said, "you must remember that you have no faith in the fortune-telling powers of the water—we will love each other just the same as if that episode had never been!"

She clung to him closer as she spoke, smoothed her delicate fingers down his coat sleeve, and laid her soft cheek upon his breast. Her passion and her sorrow had all died away by this time, and a gentle, serene happiness filled her soul. It was worth the trouble of the day to feel this one hour of bliss. The torn picture still stood beside her, the broken ring still lay in her

lover's palm ; but Alice did not think of either—*his* eyes were the only ones which fell upon the picture, his hand alone felt the ring. But he kept his arms about her and held her to him, stooping now and again to kiss her pretty lips or smooth back the hair from her still burning brow—while she returned his caresses with a loving fondness, which succeeded for the time in making him too forget.

So they stood, silent, forgetful ; feeling only the beating of each other's hearts, the soft sweet kisses,—while all around them the darkness gathered as the sun slowly sank to rest.

Presently the moon came out, flooding with light the lawn and the garden, and casting its white beams up to the very threshold of the room. Alice Chepstow started as the hall clock chimed nine.

“ How late it is ! ” she said ; “ how the time has flown by since you came, Richard ! ” Then placing her hands upon his shoulders, and looking up brightly into his face, she added, “ It was good of you to come. If you had not, I think I should have walked up to Plas Ruthven and made peace with you there. I could not have gone to bed unless we had made peace ! ”

“ You are happy now, my darling ? ”

“ Yes, quite happy ! ” she said with a sigh.

He bent to kiss her again.

“ Good night,” he said ; then, after a few more caresses, a few more gentle words, he prepared to go. He had passed through the door and was about to close it after him, when it was suddenly flung open again, and he stepped back.

“ Alice,” he said, “ what time shall I come for you to-

morrow? We have a walk of three miles before us, and if we do the thing properly, we must dip our hands in the basin some time before midday."

He spoke lightly, smiling as he did so, but there was something in his tone which pained the girl.

"You need not come for me at all!" she said. "I should like to go out early, so I will meet you at the gate lodge at half-past nine!" Then she raised her face again; he kissed her and went away.

As soon as he was gone, Alice sat down in the chair where he had found her, and fell into a reverie again. The room was very ghostly, for it was flooded with moon-beams and full of dark shadows, and the wind, which had grown very chilly, was still coming in at the window and blowing full into her face. She had not sat long before she began to shiver, so she rose, closed the window and lit the lamp. No sooner had she done so than a tap came to the door, and the maid-servant entered.

"Are you ready for your supper, Miss Alice?" she said.

"I don't want any to-night, Jane."

As Alice spoke she turned her back upon the maid, partly to hide the signs of emotion which she knew were still visible in her face, and partly to impede a view of the torn picture.

"May I lay the cloth for the master and Miss Chepstow?"

"In a minute or so. I am going to bed, Jane, but you can sit up until they come home."

Then the girl retired, and Alice was alone again. She hurriedly lifted the torn picture, carried it up to her room, and locked it in the wardrobe; then she began to make her preparations for bed. Alice did not usually

retire so early, and that night she felt more wakeful than common ; so when she had exchanged her dress for a dressing-gown, and let down her hair, she turned down the lamp, drew her chair up to the window, and sinking into it, again relapsed into thought. How quiet it was all about her ! She could hear the maid moving about down below, making the doors creak as she went and came, the clock ticking in the hall, but nothing more. Outside, the moonlight was still very bright, flooding the lawn, round which the woods loomed black as ebony. As Alice sat looking out upon the pale mystic light, she found herself thinking over all that had happened that day,—the morning spent in the church, the walk along the sands, and lastly, of the torn picture. It was this last catastrophe which now in her calmer moments weighed most heavily upon her mind, for she began to wonder what the young artist who painted the picture would think if he should ever know. Besides, she was ashamed, ashamed of herself and a little angry with her lover ; for, after all, was it not through him that she had been made to act so ? He had worked her up to frenzy, and then with one rash act she had done a deed which might become the means of bringing acute pain to the heart of an innocent man. In one angry moment she had wilfully destroyed the work which, as she well knew, it had taken months of love and labour to produce.

And now she began to think over what her sister had said to her in the morning, and to wonder for the first time whether or not this man to whom she had unresistingly given her love, was destined for ever to dim the brightness of her days ?

Whenever her interviews with him were over, and no matter how bright those interviews had been, there was always an afterglow of irritation, and that night the irritation seemed stronger than it had ever been before. It seemed to take away all the pleasure which his kisses had brought to her; all the peace and serenity which she should have felt in the consciousness of her love for him, his love for her. For love is trust, and trust is love.

Had he been able to fold her to his bosom, and cast out from his heart all doubts and fears, Alice Chepstow would have clung to him (so, at least, she thought) loving, revering, honouring as few girls could do. He had the golden ball of happiness at his feet, and he knew not what to do with it.

She sat on, dreaming half sadly, half happily, while before her vision floated her own fair face. It had come at first as it appeared on the torn canvas of the picture, but gradually it assumed a more realistic form, and grew so awful that she gazed on intently, feeling her whole body turn as cold as stone. She saw herself standing upon the lawn, with the moonlight clinging all round her, and her soft white radiance, as if from the stars falling upon her head, her slight figure dressed in white, with golden hair falling upon her shoulders,—and a face—her own face, but sadder, and with a look of divine love about the eyes, gazing up at something which she could not see. Alice gazed on. The vision expanded, another form appeared, tall and dark, with black shadows all around, completely removed from the radiance shed by moon and stars, and bearing the face of her lover, Richard Glamorgan. The figure stood before her, his eyes gazing into hers. His left hand encircled her waist, his lips were bent to hers

—when suddenly he raised his right hand and struck her to the ground.

A wild cry rose on the air. Alice leapt from her chair, where sleep and an evil dream had found her, and gazed wildly around the room.

C H A P T E R V

FIRST GLIMPSE OF PLAS RUTHVEN.

"A jolly place," he said, "in times of old ;
But something ails it now ; the place is cursed."

YES, she had been sleeping ; the vision was born of a troubled dream, but it had been so realistic that the memory of it remaining with her made her faint with fear. Trembling, she looked around the room ; it was in semi-darkness. The shaded lamp burnt dimly on the dressing-table, and the moonbeams coming in at the window made dull white beams across the floor.

It seemed to her to have grown colder. She closed the window, drew the thick red curtains to shut out the moonbeams, and turned up the light of the lamp. That was better, but the room was still chilly, and from the effects either of the night air or her dream, she was still trembling violently. She walked over to the fireplace. A well-rosined catherine wheel reposèd in the grate, a well-filled coal-box stood close beside the fender. Both had held their places undisturbed for fully two months ; with the fading of the winter weather, the necessity of fires had also departed, and the rooms at the rectory had assumed a cold, cheerless look. Or so it seemed to

Alice that night ; for as she glanced around her room, with its dimity hangings, its little vases full of flowers, its pure white bed, she thought, with a shudder, it had never looked so ghostly, so repelling, so cold. It was the grate which did it all, the black grate holding only its little rosined wheel ! So she knelt on the hearth, threw down a few coals, and applied a match to the wheel. Then she rose from her kneeling position, and saw for the first time that her sister—still wearing her bonnet and cloak, and carrying a tray in her hand—stood upon the threshold of the open door, quietly regarding her. Marion made a little movement, half in amazement, half of protest, as her eyes fell upon the vivid tongues of flame which were darting up the chimney.

“Things are turning topsy-turvy,” she said ; “a fire on a warm evening at the latter end of July !”

“I was cold !” said Alice, kneeling down again upon the hearthrug, and holding her trembling hands still nearer to the blaze.

“Cold ? yes, and hungry too,” continued Marion, now advancing steadily into the room. “I was shocked to hear from Jane that you had had nothing to eat since dinner, and then you took hardly enough to sustain life in a fly. So I have brought this to tempt you,” she added, setting the tray on a small table which she had drawn close up to her sister’s side ; “look, Alice dear, fresh gathered strawberries, some bread and butter, and a glass of my own cowslip wine !”

Alice raised her head and opened her eyes.

“Where did you get the strawberries, Marion ?”

“Eat some, dear, and I will tell you. They came from Mostyn Towers.”

"From Mrs Kingston?"

"Yes. We called there on our way home to-night, and when she heard you had a headache with walking in the sun, she asked me to bring you this little basket of strawberries and some fresh-cut flowers! A letter came from Philip last night, and in it there was a message for you!"

"For me?"

"Yes. He asks when you are going to be married, and wants to know whether, when you are Mrs Glamorgan, you will make him a present of the portrait he painted of you before he went away. Mrs Kingston asked if you would go over to-morrow and read the message for yourself. I said you should go! Poor Philip! He was very fond of you, Alice!" she concluded with a sigh.

While she had been speaking she had opened the window to put the flowers outside; she closed it again, drew together the curtains, and turned to look at her sister. Alice was still seated on the hearthrug, her hands lying listlessly in her lap.

"Will you not taste the strawberries, dear?"

Alice shook her head. How could she eat them, knowing what she did? She was thinking of the torn picture—the broken ring.

"I cannot go to Mostyn Towers to-morrow!" she said petulantly; "you should not have accepted for me, Marion. I am going to Glen Ruthven!"

Marion looked at her sister for a moment in grave, sad silence; then she walked over and took a seat at her side.

"Richard was here this afternoon, was he not, Alice?" she said.

"Yes."

“ And you have quarrelled again ? ”

“ No, Marion, we have made it up and are quite good friends ; but it has been a wretched afternoon for me. I have destroyed Philip Kingston’s picture and his ring ! ”

Then, holding her sister’s hand, she told her all, taking upon herself the greater portion of the blame, and excusing her lover, but quite unconsciously letting her sister see how matters really stood.

The story ended, Alice felt relieved, and with the lightening of her mind everything around her seemed to brighten too. Then Marion gave her one or two comforting words, and promised to keep the matter secret, and to try to repair the damage on the morrow. After that the two girls sat for a time in silence. The fire continued to crackle and send forth its livid tongues of flame, and the sisters, sitting before it, reflected its lights and shadows in their faces and on their hair. All in the house was still. More than half-an-hour had passed since they heard their father’s footsteps passing steadily to his room ; his door closed, and its sound was the beginning of silent night. They had heard, after that, the clock tick steadily, now and then a faint rustle in the ivy outside, but nothing more.

“ After all, a fire is pleasant, even when the time of year is the latter end of July,” said Marion at length, bending her face a little nearer to the blaze ; “ I wonder,” she continued quietly, “ whether they ever have anything so comforting as a fire in Plas Ruthven ? ”

Alice turned her head and looked at her sister, with eyes full of mild reproach.

“ You have always something to say against Plas Ruthven ! ” she said.

"Yes, dear, I hate the place. I shall never get over the horror which it inspired in me when I was a child. The horror was re-awakened in me to-day. We, papa and I, had occasion to pass it by this afternoon, and as my eye fell upon the spot I thought I had never seen it look more ghostly. The sun was shining brightly, but not a gleam of it penetrated *there*; the walls of the house looked blacker than ever; and all around it clustered the heavy foliaged trees, keeping out every gleam of light and sunshine and every breath of air. We could hear the roaring of the Black River, the hissing of the waters as they surged up from the Devil's Basin at Hell's Glen. The place was like a tomb. I could not believe there was any life there; but a feeling like the clammy presence of spirits made me shiver and turn cold. We passed round by the courtyard—a dilapidated place—and there we saw a human creature. It was old Owen Glendower hewing and nailing together some black planks which, he informed us, he had found cast ashore after last week's storm. Papa spoke to him, protesting against such work being done on the Sabbath day; but he grinned until his face looked like a spectre's. 'And yet, look you now, 'tis goot work, Dr Chepstow,' he said; 'Sabbath-day work too! I'm making these timbers into a cover for Mr Richard's tombstone!' As he spoke he pointed to a dusky corner in the courtyard, and we saw, resting against the rain-sodden wall, a marble tombstone! I was shocked, I must confess; then curiosity overmastered me, and I walked forward to look at the thing. It was a pure white marble slab ornamented with a jet-black cross, and bearing the inscription, 'Richard Glamorgan, born July 17, 18—, died —.' I had just completed my survey when a voice in my

ear said,—‘Look you now, Miss Chepstow, there be room enough left below for the name of Mr Richard’s *wife*!’ and turning, I beheld the old man grinning at my side. ‘Is this Mr Richard’s purchase?’ I asked, pointing to the ghostly thing; but old Owen shook his head. ‘Nay, nay!’ he said. ‘Mr Richard be none so thoughtful as to do a thing like that; that was bought by the old gentleman twenty years gone, and only came home last night!’ I was about to speak again, when an interruption came from another source. A hound, doubtless awakened from his slumbers by the sound of voices, crept from his kennel, walked with velvet tread across the yard, and, sitting down beside the tombstone, uttered a dismal howl. The horrible old man raised his hand as if to strike the poor brute, but I checked him. ‘Leave the dog alone!’ I said. ‘It is punishment enough for all his misdeeds that he has to live *here*!’”

She paused; but for a time Alice said nothing. She had crept a little nearer to the fire, and with her cheek resting upon her hand, gazed meditatively at the blaze. Sitting so, she spoke.

“Of course the place is gloomy now,” she said; “how can it be otherwise? Out of some twenty rooms, only two or three are furnished; all the pretty gardens have become wildernesses of weeds, and the whole of the mansion is in a state resembling an ancient ruin; but you seem to forget, Marion, that there is such a thing as change. An hour ago this room looked perfectly desolate; ‘I applied a match to the rosined wheel, and it changed to what you see!’”

Marion smiled sadly.

“And so by the touch of a magic wand, as it were,

you are going to transform Plas Ruthven?" she said.

"I shall try."

"And its master? Is he to remain as he is,—dark, gloomy, distrustful, and sad?"

"Ah, that I do not know! I do not care for *him* to change, Marion, so long as his love for me does not die!"

Marion rose, for she heard the hall clock strike one.

"Good-night, Alice," she said, kissing her sister. "Get to bed, dear; we have been chattering far too long."

C H A P T E R V I.

ON THE WAY TO THE HAUNTED WELL.

AT nine o'clock the next morning Alice awoke. The first glance around told her that her room had already had a visitor. The blind was pulled up to admit the sunlight, the window was slightly open to let in the fresh morning air, and the flowers, which, during the night, had stood outside her window, were now placed by her bedside. She seemed to feel the scent from them coming to her nostrils, and when she looked at them she saw that they were fresher than ever, and bedewed with drops of rain.

She closed her eyes again and lay for a moment in a half dream. It was pleasant to feel the sunshine, the morning breeze, the scent of flowers. They seemed to bring with them the assurance that the misery and dis-

content of the day before had been but phantoms which vanished before the brightness of the morning sun. But she had slept too long to allow of much time for dreaming. Nine o'clock had struck ; everybody in the house was astir, and it was time she too was moving. She rose, dressed herself, and ran downstairs, carrying her gloves and parasol in one hand, her hat in the other.

If it was pleasant upstairs, it was infinitely more so down ; every door and window was thrown open, every sun-blind pulled down, there was a mingling of warmth and shadow everywhere, coupled with the scent of flowers and newly-mown hay. Alice went into the parlour, where she found her breakfast laid out. While she was taking it, her sister came in.

"What ! dressed for walking so early ?" she said.
"Where are you going, dear ?"

Alice looked up with a bright smile.

"Did I not tell you last night ? I am going to Glen Ruthven. Richard and I intend to dip our hands in the Devil's Basin and try to read our future fate !"

Marion looked at her sister with a strange, puzzled expression in her eyes.

"Is this his idea, or yours, Alice ?"

"How can you ask ?" returned Alice reproachfully.
"Do you think anything so frivolous and childish would have occurred to *him* ? I proposed it, and he consented, just to please me."

She did not like to add that the proposition made by her in a thoughtless moment had since been regretted very bitterly ; that the fear of again seeing upon her lover's face that terrible look which she had learned to dread, had made her hold tenaciously to her word, and

had, moreover, invested the whole proceeding with a seriousness and terror which, in her saner moments, she would have laughed at.

“What folly!” said Marion.

“Of course it’s folly,” returned Alice. “You have only said what we both think; but when two people are in love with one another, foolish things are permitted, you know.”

And then, as if to prevent the conversation from going further, Alice rose, and, after promising to join her father and sister at their midday meal, set off to meet her lover.

She found him waiting for her; he, too, looked as if the sunlight had brightened his troubled soul. As he came towards her, there was a smile upon his lips and in his eyes; his kiss seemed warmer, his clasp more tender than she had ever known it before. In a moment all her misgivings vanished. She took his arm, and walked with him contentedly towards Glen Ruthven.

Not far from the village stood a gatekeeper’s lodge, opening to a desolate avenue of trees. The lodge was desolate and deserted—covered with gloomy creepers and surrounded by weeds, and there was no gate to the avenue. Directly the avenue was entered, the gloom of Plas Ruthven fell upon the pair. On every side stretched woodland and shrubberies which had once been carefully cultivated, but were now wild as the virgin forest. Great boughs met over the avenue, and beneath grew weeds and coarse grass. A heavy roar was in the dark air. The river, rushing close by, buried deep in foliage, hurried to the sea.

Well did Alice know that gloomy avenue, for she had often trodden it when a child—creeping with her sister into the woods in search of flowers. Even then it had seemed to her a dreary place. Often she had stood and gazed with timorous eyes at Plas Ruthven itself—a great ugly building, backed by walled gardens, which had once been brightly laid out and gay with human faces, but which were now tended by one aged gardener, and faced by gloomy lawns, sloping to the lonely river. And she had wondered how any human beings could have dwelt in a place so desolate.

Then the heir had returned, Alice had fallen in love with him, and suddenly it seemed to her as if every place had been illuminated by the shining of the mid-summer sun. Even Plas Ruthven partook of the splendour, and was, to her at least, transformed.

The shortest path to Glen Ruthven lay through the woodland, and past the very door of the dreary dwelling. This path was taken by the lovers, and half-an-hour after they had started, they stood together amidst the long rank grass right in front of the dwelling. Here everything had been suffered to run wild. The flower beds, once elegantly laid out, were choked with wild vegetation, magnificent rhododendrons being mingled up with great nettles and luxuriant foxglove bells. The lawn was rank and damp, and blotted with yellow weeds. All round the dark trees gathered, while the great façade of Plas Ruthven, blotted with damp, stared out with ominous windows on the surrounding gloom.

During the walk very little had been said by either of the lovers; but to Alice at least the time had passed pleasantly, for all around her was so still and peaceful,

and the man who walked by her side was the one being for her in all the world. But when she stood before Plas Ruthven everything seemed changed ; no single gleam of sunlight penetrated here, and the air was too cheerless and too sad.

“ It is a very dreary place,” she said.

“ Dreary enough,” returned her companion gloomily ; “ a strange place, too, for a young girl like you to elect to spend her life in.”

She looked up curiously at him. He was looking at her. What a strange expression his eyes had ! How his mouth was working, and with what a vicious grip his hand held hers !

“ Plas Ruthven was not always as it is now,” she said.

“ No ! ”

“ I have heard papa say as much. When he first came here, twenty years ago, Plas Ruthven was the gayest spot in the village. He has passed through the woods at midnight, and seen every window in the house illuminated, heard the sound of gay music and laughter reverberating through the forest and fading out to sea. The stables held a fine stud of horses in those days, the kennels a pack of hounds, and you yourself, then a little boy, mounted on a pretty pony, used to gallop with your father’s friends along those stretches of sand.”

“ You seem wonderfully well up in my family history ; but why recall all this just now ? ”

“ Just to show you that a dreary place need not always remain dreary. When we are married the people here shall think that the old times have come back again. Plas Ruthven shall be so transformed ”

She paused, and for a time there was silence. She was looking at the house ; he was looking at her. Presently the very intensity of his gaze drew her eyes to his face.

"What is the matter ?" she said ; "what are you thinking of now, Richard ?"

He smiled, and took her slender hand in both of his.

"I was wondering, Alice," he said quietly, "what you would say to me, if I told you that all these brilliant visions of yours could never be realised ; if you learned that in linking your lot with mine you would be passing, as it were, from sunlight into shadow ; in short, if I told you that in marrying me you would be compelled to inhabit Plas Ruthven as it stands, and become the wife of a comparative beggar !"

He paused, but she did not answer him. Her lips had turned quite white, and the hand which he held in his was tremulous and cold.

"What do you mean ?" she said presently, forcing her lips to speak.

"I mean this, Alice—that when you plighted your troth to me, you espoused all these things. I have scarcely a penny in the world."

Again he paused, but this time the white lips upon which his eyes rested remained closed, firm as marble, to the hue of which they had changed. It was to Alice as if she had received a blow which had stunned her, but had not made her stagger ; as if the sunlight had suddenly faded before the bursting of a winter storm. She stood still, feeling the nervous pressure of his hands, the keen glances from his eyes, but nothing more.

"Alice," he said, bringing his dark face close to hers, and throwing his arms about her, "I am not what is

commonly called a good man, but to-day my better angel seems to have got hold of me, and I feel I must be candid with you. We are quite private here, no one will disturb us, and if you will listen I will tell you what you ought, I suppose, to have learned from my lips several months ago."

He kept his arms around her, and drew her to a garden-seat, roughly designed and quaintly fashioned, which was placed on the lawn near the dark front of the building, and taking his place beside her, spoke again.

"Since you know so much of my family history," he said ; "since you have learned so much that passed here when I was a mere child, I have no doubt you know that eleven years since, when my father died, leaving me an orphan, everything that he had passed unreservedly into my hands. I thought I was a rich man that day, Alice, and the life which I had mapped out for myself was very similar to the one which you just pictured. I said to myself, 'I have no need to marry for money ; I will choose a woman whom I can love and who will love me ; we will make our home at Plas Ruthven ; we will brighten up the dreary dwelling, and sow peace and plenty all around.' But that was a dream, and soon to be dispelled. In less than a fortnight I learned that the property which I had inherited was heavily mortgaged. My father had done this—the money had been needed to help to pay the expenses which were so lavish in his house. The discovery was a blow to me ; but, nothing daunted, I at once set to work to think what was best to be done. My lawyers said, 'Retrench ; turn away half your servants, shut up half the rooms, and in a year or so you may be a free man !' I thought over the idea,

and finally discarded it ; it was not in my line. Swifter methods were more to my taste, and I espoused them. I could not take up my abode in Plas Ruthven alone. Until I could live in it as my forefathers had done, I determined to travel, and, if possible, make the travelling profitable to me. To travel was easy ; to make travelling profitable was more difficult. But after long pondering, many inquiries, and much work, I gained my end. I procured an appointment in India, the income of which would enable me to clear the Plas Ruthven estates in less than five years."

She listened quietly, but did not utter a word ; he cast a sad look round him and proceeded,—

"The preliminaries settled, I made my intentions known, and received the condemnation of most of my friends. None but my lawyer, and those immediately concerned in the mortgage, knew the real cause of my going out, and my conduct was looked upon as the mad freak of a hair-brained young idiot, who, having inherited a fair estate, seemed determined to let everything go to ruin and bring disgrace upon his father's name. I don't wish to lay claim to superhuman virtue, neither do I wish to impress upon you that at any time during my thirty-one years of existence my conduct has been saintly : it has not. I have had my faults—grave, dark, heinous faults—like any other man ; but I do affirm that at that period of my existence I was not much worse than half-a-dozen of the kind of men whom the world is told to honour. But the verdict of the world was against me in a measure, and that sent down the scale. My nature was gloomy and taciturn ; they called me sullen and vindictive ; hard, cruel, callous and cold ; but

I was no more any of these than—well, than *you* are ! Times have changed since then—man is what he is made, not what he is born ; and although, on the whole, I think I was meant to be a tolerably good fellow, humanity has changed me into what I am ! ”

He paused for a moment and looked at the girl who sat so quietly beside him. She had crept a little nearer to him now, and her hand, still cold and trembling, lay like a cold rose leaf in his burning palm ; her lips had regained some of their usual colour, and her eyes, so full of sad questioning, were gazing fearlessly into his. What a contrast, what strange overwhelming odds, between those two ! he so strong and dark and powerful, she so strangely sad and small !

“ Into what I see ? ” she said smiling ; “ are you then a very sinful man ? ”

“ Listen a little longer and you shall judge. Well, Alice, I went to India ; but before going I came to spend a fortnight at Plas Ruthven. I loved the place,—and coming to it was like paying one last visit to old and valued friends. I spent a fortnight here, and during that fortnight I experienced as much sorrow as joy. To be alone in a house which you have always associated with happy faces and joyful sounds ; to revisit in solitude and sorrow place after place which recalls to your mind the happier past, and shows you the future painted in darker colours than it has ever worn before,—all this is not pleasant. Such an ordeal was mine. Day after day I experienced fresh anguish, new regrets. I was not sorry when the time came for me to go. On a bright sunshiny morning I started on my journey, full of hope for the future, and thinking

with a certain sadness of the past. ‘In a few years,’ I said to myself, ‘I will return. Then the time will come for rejoicing. I now renounce my birthright, and until I can fill my place as it should be filled, I will keep away ! ’ ”

“Yes ? ”

“I had left my affairs in pretty good order, so that nothing should trouble me while I was away. Our family solicitor had the charge of everything. He wanted me to let the place, but this I declined to do. I curtailed the expenses as much as possible, and arranged to make what I could without the degradation of letting. Most of the things which were of any value—all the family plate, the family jewels, and several other valuable family relics—were removed from the house, and left in the custody of my banker. All the servants were dismissed, save two—old Owen Glendower and his wife. These two, being the very oldest and most valued servants in our family, I retained, and left to take charge of the house during the time I intended to be away ; these, together with a gamekeeper who was to preserve, kill, and sell the game, were the sole retinue left at Plas Ruthven. Well, my work prospered—at the end of five years the mortgage was paid off ; I was a free man, and the unconditional owner of Plas Ruthven.”

Again he paused, and again the girl, growing very interested now, raised her eyes inquiringly to his face.

“That was six years ago ! ” she said.

“Yes, that was six years ago.”

“And you did not come home ? I have never heard that at that time you came to Plas Ruthven ! ”

"I did not come. My work was done, but that for which I had striven had no longer the power to please me. The woman whom I loved refused to inhabit the house with me ; so its charm for me was gone !"

Alice started with a quick shiver of pain.

"The woman whom you loved !" she cried.

A hand of iron gripped her, making her shudder from head to foot. Very quietly she regained possession of her hand, and withdrew a little further from her companion's side. A fiery sword seemed suddenly to have come between them and cut them asunder.

Until that moment Alice had scarcely realised how great her love had been. And yet, while feeling so,—while her strong inclination was to thrust him away,—she inwardly forgave him every harsh word which he had uttered. His anger had always been aroused by jealousy ; and now, for the first time in her life, she began to understand what that passion meant.

"Alice," he continued, turning his gaze upon her flushed, pained face, "I have a strange tale to tell you my darling,—a tale that will make you either hate or love me. God alone knows why I have elected to tell you this to-day. I suppose some of the old honesty still clings to me, and prevents me from doing anything which might bring harm to you. Well, Alice, at the end of five years, when I might have returned joyfully to my home, I found myself held captive in another country, rendered utterly powerless—bound hand and foot, as it were, by the light from a woman's eyes. It was my first experience of the passion, and I plunged into it heart and soul. She was an Englishwoman, a sort of Lady Teazle, who, after having been reared in country

innocence, had married a wealthy man, and ruined him in three years,—just half the time she took to ruin me! When I met her, she had been separated from her husband for some time, and, having outrun the constable,—having, in short, lost all her ruined husband's money at the gambling-table,—had come out to India on speculation, hearing, doubtless, that female beauty was at a premium there, and that there were plenty of young fools, with more money than brains, whom she would find willing to replenish her stock. Having looked about her, she fixed her eyes on me and marked me for her victim, and I, fool that I was, readily fell into the snare. She played the part of the sorrowful, injured wife to me, until, what with love and pity, I grew like a raving madman. Home, friends, everything was forgotten. One day, in a wild frenzy of passion, I threw myself at her feet, avowed my love, and awaited her condemnation!"

"You did not think she loved you?"

"Whether or not, I expected to be condemned, for what was I that for my sake she should espouse dis-honour? so I bowed my head before her, and said, 'Thrust me from you : I deserve it; but I have spoken —my heart is relieved! Oh that you could kiss me, and with that kiss kill me here at your feet!' So I re-mained. When I raised my head, I saw that her face was crimson, her eyes full of tears, her trembling hands outstretched towards me. She was a wife already, she could not marry me, but she consented, through her great love for me, to become—my mistress!

"Such was my state of mind at learning my good fortune, that, had she demanded it, I would have made her mistress of everything I possessed. This being so,

I considered her demands were moderate. All she asked was that I should at once, out of my income, settle upon her the sum of five hundred pounds a-year, to be hers unconditionally for the remainder of her natural life ; that the said five hundred pounds was to be in no way used for household expenses, but that apart from, and beyond it, I was to keep her in a manner befitting her position in life and my own.

“I acceded to these demands readily, joyfully ; compared to her sacrifice, the price seemed small. The money was made over to her unconditionally, and on the day that the deeds were signed, I presented her with a gorgeous set of diamonds—our family jewels—which had been put aside for my wife, but which I had had sent over from England to present to my mistress ! My compact being fulfilled, she held to hers ; enriched with the family jewels, the five hundred pounds, she came to the house which I had provided—to all intents and purposes, my wife ! ”

“Alice, what is the matter ? ” he continued, suddenly breaking off his narrative ; “ why, my darling, you are crying ! ”

CHAPTER VII.

THE JEALOUS ARE THE DAMNED.

SHE was indeed crying. Not wildly, passionately, boisterously ; her lips were quivering, that was all ; her eyes were full, and great scalding tears coursed slowly down

her cheeks. While he had been speaking, she had withdrawn herself farther and farther from his side, and now she sat on the very edge of the garden seat.

She had been sitting thus for some minutes, when the pause in his narrative aroused her ; she wiped away her tears, and turned her white face towards him.

Glamorgan had risen from his seat, and stood now on the spongy weed-covered lawn facing the girl. His face, usually so hard and stern, had assumed a wonderfully soft expression ; his eyes were fixed, not upon her, but upon the desolate mansion of Plas Ruthven.

“ I have spent many happy days here,” he said, as if communing with himself ; “ but I don’t think I ever experienced a pleasanter sensation than I feel at this moment. Strange that the woe of one should be another’s blessing ; yet so it is. I have lacerated your little heart, Alice ; my words have been sharp enough to draw forth tears, and the knowledge of this makes me rejoice. It seems to purify the air about me; it seems to bring to my darkened soul snatches of revivifying light ; it seems to whisper in my ear,—‘ At last your search is ended ; truth, love, and above all, faithfulness, lie at your feet ; accept the reparation which has been made to you, and be at peace ! ’ Peace, peace—shall I ever find peace ? —will my troubled spirit ever be able to rest again ? Shall I ever again be able to place my faith in woman’s love ? No, no ; wherever I look dark shadows arise and trouble me ; my faith is always shaken, my love blackened and distorted, cast back to the source whence it sprang ! Alice, my darling,” he continued, again taking his seat beside her, “ I have a story to tell you yet, but first let me help you to dry your tears ! ”

He passed his handkerchief across her eyes, and kissed her tenderly ; then regaining possession of her hand, he held it in both of his.

“I won’t prolong my story ; it nauseates you, and no wonder, for now that all is over, and I look back upon the past, my very soul revolts. Well, to resume. Hélène and I lived together for several years. She refused to come to Plas Ruthven ; urging as her excuse the manner of our life, and the pain she would have to endure if she came to England, and could not be acknowledged by my circle of friends. I saw reason in her excuse, and let her have her way. So we remained abroad, travelling from one place to another, and behaving like millionaires. Hélène was extravagant in her tastes, and she had a way of charming the money out of my pockets which was characteristic. During the first three years she received, instead of the stipulated five hundred, at least double that sum, besides numerous costly presents which she admired and I bought, just for the pleasure of making her look happy. This could not last long ; I was spending four times my income. At the end of a few years I found myself literally a beggar. Plas Ruthven was again mortgaged —every acre of it ; the family jewels now belonged by right to Hélène ; all the family plate, and everything of any value, had been sold to help us ; and now, besides the dilapidated walls of Plas Ruthven, and the few articles of furniture in the house, I had nothing left in the world. I determined to make a clean breast of it to Hélène, and after that consult with her as to what it would be best for us to do.

“I had a hard struggle with myself before I resolved

to tell her; it was the part of my troubles the most nauseous to me. To drag her into the petty troubles of pounds, shillings, and pence was to me like casting a fairy into the gutter. Still, i thad to be done; and as there was no help for it, I made the resolve, and cast about in my mind to see in what way I could spare her pain. The dreaded interview was postponed for days--days and weeks--to me a time of excruciating agony, both mental and physical, for beneath the weight of trouble I felt my health giving way. But at length the ordeal was forced upon me. The English mail came in, bringing me a batch of letters with ruin written like blood-marks on every page. I had sent to my lawyer for money; the answer came telling me that it was impossible to raise a penny. Every available article had already been disposed of; Plas Ruthven was roof deep in mortgage; the advice I got was to atone for my past extravagance by reclaiming it. How was this to be done? There was but one way, and for this I should require Helena's help. I had disposed of my letters, and brought my reflections to this point, when the door of my room opened, and Helena came in. She was in full evening dress, and wore my dead mother's diamonds; her start of surprise at my condition paved the way for what I had to do. She had entered the room, pushing the door to behind her; I closed and locked it, then returned to the place where she stood.

"'Helena,' I said, 'how much money have you got?'

"It was an abrupt beginning, but I felt that to plunge at once into my subject was the only chance I had. The first start of surprise over, Helena laughed and said,—

“‘ What a question, and how melodramatically asked ! It is like a highwayman’s stand and deliver ! Is that what you would have ?’

“‘ I suppose so !’ I said, ‘for I haven’t a penny in the world ! I’m a ruined man !’

“And then, Alice, I told my story ; laid the facts before her in all their naked truth, their hideous details ; expecting every moment to see her come and sob out her sympathy on my breast. But she did not. When I had finished speaking she stood yet at her place near the table, looking like stone.

“‘ Well, dear,’ she said, when I paused, ‘what do you mean to do ?’

“The question chilled me. It was as if she had taken a knife and run it through my heart. The means of action lay in *her* hands now, my powerful days were over. But she had evidently nothing to suggest, so I spoke on, making the proposal which up till this I had fondly hoped would come from her. It was this—That she, having the right to draw from my ruined property the annual sum of five hundred pounds, should share that sum with me ; that we, dispensing with all luxuries, should make this yearly sum cover our personal expenditure ; that I, in the meantime, should work my hardest to pay my debts and clear the mortgage from Plas Ruthven. ‘And as soon as the estate is free,’ I concluded, ‘I will try to free you, Helena, in order that I may make you my wife and take you over to my home.’

“I paused, she said nothing. I looked at her ; she was whiter than ever, and the flashing of the diamonds at her throat, round her arms, and in her hair, showed her to me

in a dazzling blaze. I approached her, took her in my arms, kissed her cold lips, and whispered words of comfort; my words of love gushed forth in a wild stream, for I sickened to the heart when I thought that she suffered pain. But her lips did not kiss again; after a few moments of inanimation she freed herself from my embrace, and said, shivering, 'I am too dazed to think now; leave me to myself to-night, dear; we will talk of this again in the morning.' Then, with the faint ghost of her old smile, she left me, and I was again alone.

"The plunge was taken, but I certainly did not feel much relieved. The manner in which Helena had received my news rather disappointed me. That she was callous at heart, indifferent to my interests, I could not and would not believe, for you see I was an infatuated fool at that time, and to believe any ill of Helena seemed to me nothing short of blasphemy. Still, I was not satisfied. I had expected her to be grieved, but I had promised myself the bliss of soothing her. She had deprived me of this comfort, robbed me of the only thing which had the power to brighten my ruined life, by shutting herself up alone. I walked up and down the room in a sort of stupor, thinking of the past, planning for the future. The fact that Helena herself was the sole cause of my ruin, the knowledge that her extravagance only had been the means of bringing me to this unlucky pass, did not occur to me, or if it did, the knowledge but came to darken my soul for a moment, then be crushed, as it were, trampled upon and cast away. The only thing which troubled me was the certainty that, for a time at least, the luxuries, which seemed to have become necessities to

her, must be abandoned, and that I myself must become, as it were, a beggar at her door.

“I am not, by any means, a servile man ; the Glamorgans have been noted for centuries for their stubborn pride, and in my veins their blood flows thick and fiery enough, God knows. A few years before that night, had I been told that I would one day become dependent on a woman’s bounty, I should have hurled the lie back in the maligner’s teeth, and kicked him for his pains. Yet that very night I had sued, as it were, for alms.”

“But you had not sued for charity ? You had merely demanded back a portion of your own.”

The sound of Alice’s hollow voice seemed to recall him from a dream. He looked into her face with a strange smile.

“So that is the way you look at it, little one,” he said. “Well, nine people out of ten, blessed with ordinary feeling, would agree with you, I’ve no doubt ; but, as I have told you, I was an infatuated fool at that time, and even now my ideas upon the subject are peculiar. I argued thus : In the days of my prosperity I had given Helena the money, and from the day when the grant was made, the money ceased to belong to me. In making my demand, therefore, I was certainly suing for bounty ; laying myself under an obligation which I should never be able to repay ; but—would you believe it, little one—the very thought of this obligation came like honey to me, for I thought that I should have a proof of Helena’s love. Hitherto Love’s professions had been sweet to me, but how much sweeter would be Love’s sacrifice ! But in the end she should not suffer. Her sacrifice, her goodness, her trust in me, and love for me, would bind us together more

strongly than ever. It should be my life-long task to repay her for her sacrifice a thousandfold, and to return her love with love a thousand times as strong.

“ While I thought and argued thus, the night wore away. Four hours had passed since Helena had left me, the clock upon my chimney-piece was on the stroke of twelve. Surprised and pained at her long absence, I went to seek her. Her door was locked. I knocked sharply three times, and at each summons I called ‘ Helena.’ The door at length was opened by Helena’s French maid. The girl looked flushed ; her manner struck me even then as being very peculiar, and she was dressed for walking.

“ ‘ Monsieur must excuse madame this night,’ she said. ‘ Madame is ill. I have just been to procure remedies for her. Madame will see monsieur at nine o’clock in the morning, if he will refrain from knocking at the door or seeking madame in any way until that time.’

“ It was not the first time that Helena had been ill since we had come together, but it was the first time that I had been denied access to her room. She had been wont to say that my hands were the only ones which could smooth her pillows or support her aching head. Again and again she had denied herself to every one but me. This sudden change chilled me ; but, in my eagerness to comfort her, I pleaded like a beggar at her door, and in the end, pained and humiliated, I had to creep away.

“ I will not trouble you with many more details, Alice ; my story is almost done. That night seemed like a year to me. At nine o’clock in the morning I was again at Helena’s door. Again I found it locked. I knocked,

but got no answer. Once, twice, thrice my summons was repeated ; still it was ineffectual, save to bring about me a crowd of gaping servants. The noise we made was tremendous, but no answer came. In my frenzy I vowed that Helena was dead or dying. We broke open her door, and found her gone ! Yes, she had flown—taking everything she possessed with her, and leaving on her dressing-table this little note for me ! ”

He put his hand into his pocket, drew forth a stained and crumpled paper, opened it, and held it towards his companion.

“ Would you like to read what Helena said ? ” he asked. “ Here, Alice, are her very words.”

He held forth the note, but no hand was outstretched to take it. Alice sat before him, looking as lifeless as stone ; a terrible struggle was going on within her, which at last she overcame. She took the note from his hand and read it. It ran thus :—

“ MY DEAR RICHARD,—Ever since I have known you I have believed you to be a rich man. If you have lived beyond your income you have only yourself to blame. I have never been accustomed to poverty, and cannot share it. The money which, thanks to my own forethought, I am still possessed of, is enough for one, but insufficient for two. You are a man, and can make your way in the world. I am a helpless woman, and must look to myself. Adieu ! With much love and regret,

“ HELENA BANYARD.”

Having read the letter, Alice crushed it in her hand,

and thrust it back into her lover's palm. Then she rose and walked feebly away.

"Alice," he cried, "where are you going?"
"I am going home."

CHAPTER VIII.

ELEMENTAL OMENS.

DURING the first half-hour Alice had been experiencing feelings which seldom come twice during a woman's life. Jealousy, a passion hitherto unfamiliar to her, had seized her and was scorching up her soul. She loved the man, and yet she hated him; she felt impelled to kiss, and to strike, him. She did the very best thing in her power when she walked away. She had not gone a hundred yards, however, when her lover's arms were round her.

"Alice, my darling!"

She struggled wildly to get free.

"Let me go, sir! How dare you hold me! I tell you I wish to go home!"

She turned her face towards him. It was pale with passion. The teeth were clenched, the eyes flashing. She was a frail little thing compared to the tall, muscular, broad-shouldered man who held her, yet at that moment, so keenly had jealousy stung her, she looked capable of resisting him to the utmost.

As Glamorgan looked at her his eye brightened. A

look of fierce pleasure and contentment softened his features. There was a smile round his mouth and in his eyes. He held her firmly in his arms and wildly kissed her.

"Alice, don't struggle, don't give way to your passion like this. I have more to tell!"

"But I will not listen. I do not wish to hear another word."

Again she struggled to get free, but he held her firmly, exhorting her to be calm. His efforts were successful. Her passion having spent itself, tears came, and with them the inclination to cling to the man who held her so fondly to him. He led her to the seat again, and, still holding her by both hands, continued his strange tale.

"You must hear the end, Alice," he said; "having endured the torture, you must submit to the process of being healed. Well, when I read that letter it affected me for a moment, much in the same way as it has affected you. For four-and-twenty hours I was like a raving madman; then my reason returned, and with it a terrible thirst for revenge. I know no medium in my feelings, and my hatred for Helena was now a thousand-fold as powerful as my love for her had been. During those twenty four hours my eyes had been opened, Now that the blow had finally fallen, there were dozens to tell me that for years I had been befooled; that Helena, having been habitually unfaithful during the six years that we remained together, had capped her crimes by flying with a young officer, who had been a constant visitor at our house! I followed them, intending to kill them both. I spared the woman, but I challenged

her lover, and stabbed him, as I thought, to the heart."

Alice started and turned paler than before.

"You *killed* him?" she said.

"No," he answered; "I did not kill him—do not start, little one, do not look so horrified and pale. Thank God, I am not guilty of the crime of murder! The wound which I inflicted was not fatal; the poor devil recovered, and returned to the arms of the woman who had caused his woe and mine. I would not take revenge upon Helena, but I vowed to myself that I would have reparation. In my own mind I determined that a woman should be the instrument to heal the wound which Helena had made. All my estates and money were gone. I resolved to marry a woman whose fortune should restore both. The course which I had planned, and which seems to me now both despicable and mean, I then believed to be just. I had fully determined in my own mind that my love for and faith in woman were gone for ever, having once been tampered with, crushed, and wounded. I felt that I could never again set up in my soul the ideal which I had once worshipped,—never again look upon a woman's face with any degree of pleasure. Nevertheless, I said to myself that I should be justified in making use of a woman for the purpose of re-establishing the old house and the old name, which Helena had done her best to destroy. On this principle I determined to act. But before my work began, I felt I must satisfy an inward craving which I had had for years to see Plas Ruthven. I came home. How well I remember that night! It was the return of the prodigal son without the episode of

the fatted calf, the happy forgiving faces. I came to my home without a soul to recognise me or give me welcome. It was a bitter cold night towards the end of last January. There had been a heavy snowfall, and the roads were almost impassable. Nobody seemed to be about, so I had the village pretty much to myself. As I plodded along towards Plas Ruthven, I passed by the door of the vicarage. The lights were up, no blinds were drawn, and, as I was passing along, my eyes, which had been carelessly surveying the building, suddenly became fixed upon a figure which occupied one of the rooms. Surely it was preordained that you were to be my salvation, for as I stood there that night, gazing for the first time upon your face, sickened, saddened, crushed, and almost heart-broken, I felt a sense of relief and happiness steal over me, which seemed to allay my pain. You stood before the fire, Alice, with your hands clasped behind you, your eyes sadly looking upward, joining in a hymn which your sister was playing on the harmonium. I could see the firelight playing on your hair and sending lights and shadows across your face. You were looking upward then, my darling, just as you are looking upward now!"

The girl smiled faintly.

"I remember that night," she said; "I was in the house alone with Marion; papa had gone to the village to see a man who was dying. I had been very restless and a little nervous all the evening, and as I stood singing (I remember it so well) a man's shadow seemed to come between me and the moonlight; then, when I looked round, it disappeared. For a little while I was so frightened I could not move; then I summoned up

courage to go to the door. No one seemed to be abroad ; the snow was lying thick on the ground and the wind was wailing ; that was all ! ”

“ So I began by casting a black shadow upon you ! ”

“ It must have been your shadow cast into the room by the dim moonlight. I have never said anything about it ; but I have always wondered until now ! ”

“ You are satisfied now ? ”

“ Satisfied ? ”

“ And yet,” he returned slowly, “ if your story were to be made known, superstitious people would tell you that you had still cause for fear. The shadow has been succeeded by the reality. It may be preordained that I should bring you nothing but sorrow ! ”

She looked up at him with grave, earnest eyes.

“ You believe that ? ” she said.

“ Do I believe ? ” he repeated. “ Alice, I am a man who believes in nothing—to look beneath the surface is my motto now ; to stifle blind belief with cold unbelief, until all things with a fair surface have been severely tried. You cannot know the full value of an untested jewel. It is the same in all the issues of life, the great as well as the small.”

Silence came upon them again. Alice, gazing at the cold dark forest all around her, was dimly thinking of all that had passed before that day. While she remained silent, she had crept nearer and nearer to her lover’s side, slipping her cold hands into his, and feeling in his presence a certain kind of joy. Suddenly she drew back.

“ Richard,” she said quietly, “ shall you continue to doubt *me* all your life ? ”

His eyes were fixed upon her ; his fingers closed convulsively upon her hand ; but he said nothing.

“ You did cast a shadow upon me that night,” continued the girl quietly ; “ it was the shadow of suspicion and distrust, which has always kept us apart. Sometimes I have said to myself, ‘ If he would only test my love, he would have no further cause for fear ! ’ ”

He gripped her hands still tighter.

“ You would not be afraid ? ” he said.

She looked at him with wondering eyes.

“ Why should I fear ? ” she said.

“ Because,” he answered, “ if you were to falter or fail —God help you ! God help us both ! Alice,” he continued, bending towards her and taking her face between his trembling hands, “ I have told you how I loved Helena Chester,—I know now that my love for her was child’s play compared to what I feel for you ! She plunged me into darkness,—you raised me again into the light ; you have become my second self, and sooner than find you false as she was, I would, much as I love you, strike you dead with my own hand ! ”

“ And yet you doubt me ! You have always doubted me ! I have never once looked into your eyes and found complete confidence and love ! ”

“ You have not found confidence, for whenever I look into your eyes I seem to see the shadow of that woman, and then my trust vanishes like light before the rain. That shadow pursues me ! that woman seems destined for ever to drag me down ; but, in spite of it all, I love you ! ”

The girl looked at him quietly, and said,—

“ I have heard that a man’s first love is stronger than any which he is likely to feel if he lives for a hundred

years ; until to-day, I believed that your first love was given to me ! ”

“ My first and best, my darling ! I never knew what love was until I saw you ! ”

He stretched forth his arms towards her, but the girl quietly put them away.

“ Your first love was given to that lady. If you felt for her what you have said, it seems to me that you could never love again ! ”

He looked at her in silence for a time, then he quietly took her hand.

“ Alice, do you doubt *me* ? ”

“ And if I do, I think you will own that I have some cause. If I had told you a story similar to the one which you have just told me, I wonder what your feelings would be at present ? ”

For a moment his face was strangely distorted ; he forcibly took possession of her waist and held her to his side.

“ That would be a different matter ! ”

The girl said nothing more, but she did not return the pressure of his hands. Presently she rose and began again to walk away. This time she walked into the woodlands, taking the narrow footpath which wound among the trees and led towards the glen. The man did not attempt to detain her, but followed her closely.

Several hours had passed since she had left her home ; the sun was now at meridian heat, and all the earth was basking beneath its rays ; but not a ray penetrated the dark trees of the forest. The ground was very spongy to the tread, and the heavily foliaged branches which intertwined overhead shut out every glimpse of sunlight and blue sky.

They emerged from the forest, and for some time followed the highway, which wound through low green hills. Sometimes a country cart, or a farmer on horse-back, or a peasant woman in a huge Welsh hat, passed by, but otherwise the road was deserted. Presently, passing through an iron gate, they crossed a field ; while so doing, they could hear the roar of water in the distance. Quitting the field by another gate, they left the sunshine, and again entered the shadow of the woods. As they went the roar of the water grew louder. The path which they pursued led to the brink of a woody chasm, down in the depths of which the river cut its way through solid granite. Over the chasm stretched a wooden bridge, crossing which, they found a precipitous path leading right down to the side of the roaring river. The girl clung to her lover as they descended. The roar deepened till her head was dizzy. Then reaching the bottom, they came out on a slab of black ironstone, and stood at the foot of foam-white falls.

They paused for a moment to look up and listen : then holding each other's hands tightly, for the rock seemed to shake beneath them, they gazed into the black pool which bubbled in a rocky basin at their feet.

On either side of the basin rose massive rocks and trees of sad-coloured foliage, which mingled their thick branches above the water, as if determined to exclude every gleam of revivifying light. Hitherto the lovers had clung together in silence ; now Glamorgan spoke.

“ Alice, give me your hand ! ” he said.

She started, turned towards him, and, without a word, laid her cold fingers in his palm. For the last half-

hour or so Alice's wish to try her fortune in the Devil's Pool had increased tenfold, not for the sake of proving her love, but of testing that of the man who stood by her side. She had forgotten all about Philip Kingston, the ring and the picture ; it was the memory of Helena Banyard which now filled her mind. She put her fingers into her lover's palm, then shrunk back in fear. How his hand was burning ! She looked at his face, and saw that his features were convulsed,—his face wearing that expression which she dreaded. Her own heart sank, but she forced her cheek to smile.

"We are two foolish creatures to have rushed into such a position as this," she said ; "do not let us carry the folly further. Richard, come away!"

She made a movement as if to depart, but his fever-burning hand gripped her fingers more firmly. He laughed.

"Now that we are here we will dip in!" he said. "Come, Alice, do not be afraid. Let us take the test together!"

This time the girl said nothing, but quietly knelt beside her lover on the iron-stone slab. They bent over the deadened water of the pool, and thrust in their clasped hands. No sooner had they done so than a faint cry escaped the girl's lips. The sunlight faded, the wind blew, the elements seemed disturbed. Glamorgan's fury clasp was loosened and Alice set free !

For a moment she knelt alone on the rock ; then her lover's arms were around her.

"Alice, my little darling !" he said, "the water lies ! In spite of it all, you are going to be my wife !"

C H A P T E R I X.

D R I F T I N G A S U N D E R.

FOR three days after that strange scene at Glen Ruthven the lovers did not meet. Alice, pale, silent, and pre-occupied, seldom passed beyond the vicarage gates, while Glamorgan remained within the dreary walls of Plas Ruthven.

There was no one to notice this but Marion Chepstow, and she, having since her sister's engagement been seldom in the habit of seeing much sunshine in her face, said to herself, "It is another of their lovers' quarrels," and deemed it prudent to leave matters alone. But her resolution did not last. Three days passed; Alice grew more silent, more preoccupied and paler than ever; and at last her sister, noting all this, deemed that the time had come for her to interfere.

The resolution was taken on the afternoon of the third day, as she was walking home alone in the slowly-gathering twilight. By the time she reached home it had resolved itself into a fixed determination to force an explanation from her sister, and if possible bring this sinister engagement to a close.

She had left Alice sitting in the drawing-room, the girl having declined the invitation to go out, saying that she had a headache, and dreaded the warm rays of the sun; so of course she anticipated no difficulty in finding her on her return. On reaching the house

she walked straight to the drawing-room, and found it empty. She searched the house and the garden in vain ; she inquired of the servant, who knew nothing. Then she went upstairs to take off her things, and solved the mystery. Her bedroom window commanded an extensive view of the sea-shore. She saw two figures walking amicably side by side upon the sands. She recognised her sister and her lover.

“The mountain would not come to Mahomet, so Mahomet must needs go to the mountain,” she said ; and the expression of her face was not altogether pleasant when she descended the stairs again.

In her conjectures Marion was wrong. Alice had not run after her lover. The meeting had been brought about thus : The moment Marion had left the house that afternoon, Alice, grown weary of holding before her eyes a book, the pages of which were to her nothing but blank paper, had cast the thing aside, and, with her hands clasped behind her, had walked restlessly up and down the room. She was still pursued by the demon which had haunted her for three days past—the shadow of Helena Banyard ; and her heart was still troubled with forebodings which she had never been able to shake away. “He loved that woman,” she said to herself, “and if she were to cross his path he would love her again.” Then she fell to wondering what had kept him so long from her, and she could devise no better reason than that his heart had gone back to the woman to whom he had at first given it, and he therefore no longer felt an irresistible desire for the companionship of the one who loved him *now*.

Alice certainly loved the man, and her love for him was even greater than she herself could understand. She would have forgiven him any crime save that of having loved another woman, and, worse still, of being possessed of so little discretion as to have failed to keep the knowledge of this love to himself. Alice had not even the satisfaction of knowing that she had been the woman's successful rival. No; Helena had had her day, and had been herself the means of bringing that day to a close. She had sucked her orange dry, and had cast aside the refuse for whoever cared to take it. It had fallen at the feet of Alice Chepstow, and she had accepted it, and in her ignorance been content.

This was the view which Alice now took of the affair ; it was not a pleasant view, and small blame could therefore be attached to her when she felt inclined to undervalue the love which was hers at last. She reviewed the dark scene at the pool ; the memory of it only added to the suspicions which had taken so strong a hold upon her. She had superstitiously persuaded herself by this time, that while her hand had been beneath the water she had distinctly felt cold fingers unloosen her lover's grasp and set her free.

Of course it was all folly, and in her sane moments Alice would have acknowledged as much ; but at this period of her life the girl was not sane. Jealousy, suspicion, superstition, and distrust had taken possession of her, and had changed her, as it were, into another being. Added to all this, she had no one to whom she could open her heart, for her lover kept away. This was the cause of the change which her sister noticed in her, and which puzzled her so sorely.



Alice walked about the room until she was tired, then she passed through the glass-door out on to the lawn. It had been very hot all day, but now the sun was sinking to rest, twilight was beginning to gather, and the heavy dew which fell upon the earth seemed in a measure to cool the heated air. It was certainly very refreshing, and, after one or two turns up and down the lawn, Alice felt that the air was pleasant. It seemed to brush away the cobwebs from her brain, and disperse all the morbid fancies, which of late had troubled her. She began to regret now that she had not accepted her sister's invitation to go with her to the village; "but," she said to herself, "I will make amends by going to meet her; but first I must see that papa is all right." With this intention, she approached the house and peeped in at the library window. There sat Mr Chepstow at his desk, busily at work upon his Sunday sermon, and with a pile of letters, which the four o'clock post had brought, lying near his right hand. Alice knew that with so much work before him he would not stir for two hours at least, so, without saying a word to any one, she quickly re-entered the house and ran upstairs to equip herself for walking. Her toilette was soon made, and she descended the stairs with light noiseless step, and passed unseen out of the house. She would have passed out of the gate also, but at this point she came face to face with her lover.

Glamorgan had intended to enter the vicarage garden; the sight of Alice, dressed for walking, made him pause and ask whither she was going.

"I am going to the village to meet Marion!"

"Does she expect you?"

“No.”

“Then come with me. I must be with you alone to-night. Take my arm, Alice; we will walk along the sand by the sea.”

Utterly bewildered, but feeling a strange sense of happiness begin to steal over her, Alice allowed him to take her hand upon his arm and lead her away. They walked straight to the shore. Glamorgan glanced around him, no living soul was visible; he turned to Alice and took her in his arms. He held her to him passionately; he kissed her lips, her forehead, her hands, until the girl, more bewildered than ever, pushed him away.

“Don’t do that, Alice,” he said quietly; “those are almost the last kisses I shall have for many months to come.”

The girl looked at him strangely.

“What do you mean?”

“I am going out to China, Alice, and the ship which takes me will put to sea in less than three days.”

At these words the girl’s heart seemed to turn to stone; all the forebodings, which for the last three days had troubled her so sorely, returned tenfold. It seemed to her that the black prophecy of the magic well was already beginning to be wrought out. She held out her hands towards him, and cried with a piteous moan,—

“Oh, Richard, if you have any care for me, do not go away.”

CHAPTER X.

A LONG FAREWELL.

THIS sudden exclamation affected him very strangely. At first he was pleased, and his pleasure was revealed by the sudden illumination of his face, for his heart seemed to say, "She loves me, and dreads to part," then the light faded from his features, his face clouded, for the devil whispered in his ear, "She is as unstable as the wind ; it is the knowledge of her own weakness, not the sorrow of being separated from you, which makes her dread this parting."

Distrust and suspicion had become a disease with the man. Having once taken hold of his vitals, they retained their hold ; he could no more help doubting than the sun can help shining. He tried to exorcise the demon, but it wrestled with and subdued him. It convulsed his features, agitated his frame. It made him pace the sand in agitation, then pause before the girl and hold forth his hands.

"Alice," he said hoarsely, "put your hands in mine, and swear before God that you will never marry any man but me !"

Alice raised her eyes and stared at him in mingled amazement and fear ; she had had her own thoughts, her own doubts, her own dark forebodings. She was still thinking of Mrs Banyard, so she said,—

"No, I will not swear that. If you were to become untrue to me, I should not consider myself bound!"

His face clouded for a moment, then it brightened

He folded his trembling arms about her and held her to his breast.

"You think that I could be untrue to you?" he said. "Oh, my darling, how little you know me; neither the inducement of all the pleasures of heaven, or the fear of all the tortures of hell, could make me false to you!"

"Since that is so," she returned quietly, "why have you come to tell me that you are going away?"

Then he gave her an account of his doings for the last few days.

It amounted to this, that he, so far overcome by his love for Alice as to perceive the cruelty of marrying her and condemning her to a life of poverty and dulness, had resolved to improve his position, as far as lay in his power. With this idea he had gone to London to consult his lawyer. The old man, delighted at the prospect of a change in his friend's mode of life, and anxious to do all in his power to aid him, had immediately set to work to see what could be done. He was zealous, and his zeal was rewarded; he worked for a day, and by the end of that time had achieved what he considered wonderful success. The young man, calling at his office on the third morning, was met with the news,—

"I have a post at my disposal which only you could fill,—and which would yield you fifteen hundred pounds a-year. Will you take it?"

"I have no doubt of it; but the conditions?"

"First, that you live in Canton, at least so long as you wish your income to last; and next, that you sail from Southampton in five days from this. Neither of these conditions are unsurmountable to a man in your position!"

"Insurmountable? No; but they are certainly not easy to comply with. I do not wish to go abroad!"

"But you want money, and situations in England are not lucrative to men like you! It will broaden your ideas as well as fill your pockets!"

"Then, again, I do not wish to start so soon."

"A mere whim, my dear fellow—a mere whim. You have only to pack your portmanteau and go on board. Take my advice, and don't throw away such a chance too hastily. Sleep over it, and come to me with your answer at nine o'clock to-morrow morning!"

Glamorgan took this advice. Punctually at nine o'clock the next morning, he walked into the lawyer's office to accept the Chinese appointment.

There was a great deal to be done before he could sail; many of his affairs to arrange, and much to talk over with the lawyer. The old man proposed that they should begin forthwith, but Glamorgan declined. Now that he had decided to go he wanted to get back to communicate his intentions to Alice; but before leaving London he had promised to return at least two days before the one on which it was appointed that the vessel should sail.

Having heard him patiently to the end, Alice sat for a moment regarding the silent sea; then she turned her face towards him, and he saw that it was pale with emotion and wet with tears.

"Richard," she said, "I do not mind your being poor—I do not mind living with you in a desolate half-empty house like Plas Ruthven; but you must not go away and leave me here alone!"

At first he was startled, then he gave her the advice

which the lawyer had given to him—to sleep upon it, and tell him in the morning whether or not he ought to go.

The next morning her views upon the subject were certainly very much changed. Still she would not urge his going; but she had come to regard it with rather more tolerance. She did not now say, "Stay with me!" She only said, "How long are you likely to be away?"

The fact is, on the previous evening she had spoken to her sister, told her the exact state of affairs, and asked her advice. As Marion had never favoured the match when she believed Glamorgan to be tolerably rich, she favoured it still less now that she knew him to be poor.

"By all means let him go. His very wish to improve his position before he marries you, is the one gleam of good that I see in him!"

Then she had pointed out to her sister the kind of life she would have to lead if she married Richard and poverty, until Alice, terrified at the picture, was thankful that her persuasions on the night before had been of so little use. It was certainly a dreadful thing to send her lover to China; but there was consolation in the thought that the pain of parting was only the fore-runner of years of happiness.

Glamorgan had two days to spare, and most of each was passed with Alice. Despite the pain of parting, Alice thought she had never known a happier time. He was so genial to her, distrust seemed to have vanished, and in its place was unparalleled confidence and love. And because he was so genial and kind, Alice made various demands which he had to accede to. The first

was that, at the utmost, they should not remain parted more than two years ; having made him agree to this, she gradually decreased the period to one year ; then she made him promise that, if the place where he was located was at all fit for her to live in, he would return at the end of nine months, marry her, and take her back. Having brought matters to this state, Alice was perfectly contented. Nine months would soon pass, she thought, and, after all, to have to live in China was perhaps no worse than being compelled to become an inmate of Plas Ruthven.

Meanwhile time sped on ; minutes changed to hours, hours to days ; the utmost limit of Glamorgan's stay had been reached, and the time had come for him to go.

All the morning the lovers had been together, revisiting their old haunts. They had wandered along the shore, across the limitless stretches of sand ; they had entered the quaint little church, and, kneeling before the altar, they had clasped each other's hands, and sworn never to desecrate the love which bound them, by letting it fade or die. They had gone to the Devil's Pool, and, standing there amidst the shadow of the forest, the roar of the falling water, they had clasped hands and exchanged love symbols, as dozens of others had done before ; and, looking down into the water, they had tried to read the mystery of future years. But the water flowed from cascade to basin, and so on from rock to rock down the bed of the winding stream, revealing nothing ; and all around it was blackness, death, and decay, but *not* a single gleam of light. Was it an augury ? Alice feared so. She still remem-

bered with dread the touch of the cold hand which had loosened the clasp of her lover's fingers and set hers free. She looked up to speak of these things, then looked down again in silence. Her companion had his prospects, and they were not of the pleasantest kind. He thought, "She stood here and tried love spells with another man, just as she has tried them with me. If, in passing from her sight, I were to become like the rotting leaves in the forest, she might forget me as she forgot him."

At three o'clock the lovers parted. Alice returned to the vicarage, Glamorgan to Plas Ruthven, to complete one or two arrangements which he had to make before he could go away. Two hours' work completed all he had to do,—then, having given one last lingering look at the old place, he walked up to the vicarage to say farewell. The servant, without announcing him, showed him at once into the dining-room, where he found the two sisters sitting hand in hand.

He saw at a glance that Alice had been crying, and even Marion looked sad. She rose immediately upon his entrance, and, saying something about going "to tell papa," walked quickly out of the room, leaving the lovers alone. She found her father in his study, busy with his books as usual, and quite forgetting the affairs of this world in the limitless problem of the next. On hearing of Glamorgan's arrival, he rose at once to go to him, but Marion put her hand upon his arm.

"Perhaps we had better stay here," she said; "there will be plenty of time for us to say good-bye when he has taken leave of Alice"

"Very well, my dear," said Mr Chepstow, and resumed his seat.

They sat there for fully an hour ; then Marion heard the dining-room door open quickly, emitting a murmur of voices, mingled with sobs and tears ; then the door closed again. She hastily stepped out of the library and met Glamorgan in the hall. He looked very much agitated, and pity for his pain rather than sorrow for his loss made her clasp his hand more warmly than she had ever done before. She murmured "Good-bye ;" then leaving him to her father, she hurried into the dining-room to her sister.

She found Alice crying—so violently, so hysterically, that she could neither speak nor hear. The violence of her grief rather surprised her sister, who had always imagined that Alice would certainly lead a more tranquil life without her lover than with him. The truth of the adage, "A blow from the hand of the man we love is sweeter than a flower from the one we love not," seemed to be here proved singularly true. Alice was inconsolable for the loss of the one man who had had the power to cause her so much pain.

So Alice cried on until her strength was quite exhausted, and all the time her sister did what she could to console her. But Marion was by no means easy in her mind. Though she tried to console, she could not sympathise with her sister. She could not share such sorrow ; indeed, she knew that her soul was relieved, now that the man was gone.

When Glamorgan reached London that night St Paul's was striking twelve. He hailed a hansom and

drove at once to his hotel. His first proceeding was to order supper ; then he followed his luggage to his room, washed, and changed his clothes,—a process which was very necessary after a railway journey of seven hours. Having completed this, he pulled from his portmanteau a little leather writing-case, and prepared to write a letter to Alice.

It was the first time that he had sat down to write a love letter since the impassioned notes which he had been wont to pen to Helena Banyard, and as he sat with the paper before him, the pen in his hand, and the words, "My darling Alice," staring him blankly in the face, recollections crowded upon him which paralysed his hand and clouded his brain. A tap at the door brought him to himself again. Thrusting down all recollections of his past, and concentrating all his thoughts on the present and the future, he applied himself to his task, and soon finished the letter. It was written, folded, enclosed in its envelope ; it only wanted sealing. He had both sealing-wax and matches ; he searched his case for a seal. There was none there ! Having searched the pockets of his coat, he inserted his fingers in the pockets of his waistcoat. In the right-hand pocket he found nothing, but in the left his fingers came upon something hard ; he pulled it forth, expecting to see a favourite seal, but he found it was a ring.

A little hoop of gold, decorated on one side with three jagged holes, which looked to him like the sockets of three orbless eyes. Before that hoop was battered, and when those rayless holes had been filled with three glimmering sky-blue stones, he had seen that ring

decorating Alice's finger. The mere recollection of this sent over his face a look which Alice always knew to be the forerunner of a violent storm. He was glad that he had written the letter: he could not have written it now. That plain little hoop of gold was like burning fire. It burnt his hand and withered up his soul. He tossed it on to the floor, and, having closed and locked his bedroom door, went down to walk off his excitement in the moonlit streets.



CHAPTER XI.

INTRODUCES A HIGHLY RESPECTABLE FAMILY.

WHEN he awoke in the morning he looked for the ring, which the darkness of the preceding night had hitherto concealed from him. It was lying near the dressing-table, glittering in the sunlight. He picked it up at once, and, as soon as he was dressed, he opened Alice's letter and put the ring inside. Then he went down to breakfast.

He had sketched out his movements for that day, and every hour was occupied. His first care, however, on going out was to post the letter. This done, he congratulated himself. To return the ring had cost him a struggle; the struggle had ended in victory, and he was well pleased.

He had posted his letter at Charing Cross; he at once

hailed a hansom and drove straight to Chancery Lane. He alighted on the pavement before a very musty, dirty-looking doorway. He entered and ascended a flight of narrow, worm-eaten stairs, which were so old and so decayed-looking, they seemed as if they would collapse before the first firm, well-planted foot, and crumble to decay. However, he ascended them in safety. Having done so, he found himself standing on a small piece of oil-cloth, surrounded by several doors. All the doors were closed but one; this was thrown wide, and revealed to the new-comer about half-a-dozen very tall stools, and about half that number of desks. At these desks were several very seedy-looking clerks of all ages, who, with bent heads and rounded shoulders, were writing away as if their very liyes depended upon their swiftness; while a step or two nearer to the door was a tall, pale youth with straw-coloured hair, who lounged with crossed legs, and hands lying idly in his pockets, and stared at Glamorgan through a pair of double eye-glasses.

Glamorgan asked if Mr Tremaine was at the office.

“Yes,” drawled the youth, as if he were trying to what possible length the monosyllable could be stretched. Then he strolled over to a desk and got a piece of paper; having done this, he strolled back again and asked the gentleman’s name. By this time all the clerks had ceased writing; all their heads were up, though their shoulders were not straightened; so Glamorgan had about six pair of eyes fixed upon him now, instead of one. Glamorgan gave his name, and, after another prolonged stare, the youth began very leisurely to write

it down. To his amazement the pen was suddenly taken from his hand, the name written, the paper handed to one of the clerks, and an imperious order given to take it at once to Mr Tremaine.

"If you can afford to fritter your time away, I can't," said Glamorgan; "look sharp, my man, or I shall make bold to announce myself."

The indolent youth, too vapid to get angry, stared in stupid amazement, while the seedy clerk, having taken the slip of paper to his superior, returned to conduct in the stranger too.

Having followed his guide up another flight of narrow, worm-eaten stairs, Glamorgan found himself standing before a door, on which the word "Private" was marked in very black letters indeed. The door yielded at once to pressure, and he found himself in another room. This room was slightly smaller than the one the clerks occupied, slightly colder, slightly dirtier, and a good deal more uncomfortable. It was full of square tin boxes, labelled, "A. Langden—dec'd. Estates of D. Llewellen," and so on. Amidst this heterogeneous collection, seated before a table, which was piled up with letters and deeds, was a little old man, dressed in very threadbare clothes, and with his feet wrapped up in furs.

This was Mr Tremaine, who had taken in hand the management of the Glamorgan estates some twenty years before the present heir was born, and whose father and grandfather had managed them before him. He had procured Richard his Indian appointment, and now got him his China one. He had no soft sentiment about him, but he had several times rescued his client from ruin,

even in his own despite, and what he had done—not once, but several times—he was quite willing to do again. His one business wish in life was to right the Plas Ruthven estates, and, before he closed his eyes, to have the satisfaction of seeing them unembarrassed and in the hands of their proper owner. With this view he had paid off all the mortgage money, and become himself the sole mortgagee ; but fearing that Richard, whom he regarded as a gloomy ne'er-do-well, would be inclined to encroach were the whole truth known, he kept the matter a strict secret, even from his daughter, and continued to talk of people as entities, whom he alone knew to be myths. So far, this double dealing of his had done no good. He had regularly received the percentage due to him on his mortgage money, and had been as exacting as any stranger could be—always giving, as an excuse for his own extortion, the penurious character of the mythical mortgagee.

The fact is, he had very little pity for Glamorgan ; a man who could squander away his money as he had done, and, at the capricious bidding of a woman, ruin a valuable estate, deserved no pity in his eyes. He had other motives for wishing to reinstate him in his proper position. These motives of his will soon become known.

When Glamorgan entered the office-room the old man rose, kicked aside the furs with an energy that belied his years, and welcomed him most cordially ; then, having invited Glamorgan to take a seat, he resumed his own.

“ I can only give you a quarter-of-an-hour,” he said, glancing at the clock on the chimney-piece. “ You ought to have dined with me last night.”

Glamorgan was well aware of the fact—he had been all along ; but the temptation of dining with the Tre-

maines had been insufficient to draw him from Alice. He did not mention this, however, and business went on. At the end of the fifteen minutes they had settled a good deal, but as much more remained unsettled. The lawyer rose, however, and pronounced the interview at an end.

"Come to my house at half-past six to-night," he said ; "we shall have the evening before us, and can discuss these things at our ease. When I'm at home I usually throw off the shop, as you know, but I don't mind departing from my rules for *you*."

The two men shook hands. Glamorgan walked towards the door ; he had just gained it, and was about to pass out when the voice of his companion arrested him.

"Glamorgan," said he, "you are bent on going to China, I suppose ?"

The question was a curious one, coming from such a quarter. Glamorgan looked amazed, then he reminded his friend that, so far from being bent upon going, he had, for four-and-twenty hours, persistently refused, and at last, through the urgent advice of Mr Tremaine himself, he had consented to go.

"But you came to me for advice ; you wanted to do something ?"

"I wanted to turn myself from a homeless wild beast into a man again."

"Humph ! to speak more plainly, you want to dis-embarrass Plas Ruthven."

"Precisely."

"And if you could do this without going abroad, you'd prefer it ?"

"Of course. I have reasons—very strong reasons—for not wishing to leave England just now ; all my

nature revolts at going. I fought with and conquered my feelings, but the struggle was hard."

The old man screwed up his eyes and looked keenly at Glamorgan, noted his athletic shape, grim face, and shapely head, then he again glanced at the clock.

"Come to me at half-past six to-night," he said, and, with a wave of his hand, dismissed him.

Precisely at half-past six o'clock that night, Glamorgan alighted on the pavement opposite the door of Mr Tremaine's private residence, a large double-fronted but dreary-looking mansion in Bloomsbury Square. The door was opened by a man-servant who had all the manners of a mute. This worthy welcomed Glamorgan with a cold clerical bow, and having escorted him along a dimly-lighted passage, ushered him into a dimly-lighted room.

Glamorgan was almost as familiar with this room as he was with the desolate-looking apartments at Plas Ruthven.

Ten years before, when he was preparing to go to India, he had spent a month in London, and during that month he had lived almost entirely with the Tremaines. He had ridden in the Row with the lawyer's daughter, a marriageable girl of about eighteen ; he had joined the family dinner-table at least three days a-week ; and, in polite recognition of the hospitality thus shown him, he had been in the habit of bringing the young lady bouquets, and of escorting her to places of amusement. Mrs Tremaine cherished the hope that such assiduous attentions were not idly given ; but at the end of the month, greatly to her amazement, Glamorgan calmly said "Good-bye" to them all, and took his departure. Since that day she had never once beheld him.

On being ushered into the room, Glamorgan had taken a look round to see if there was any one to welcome him. Having ascertained that there was not, he scowled at himself in the glass ; then he sat down, turned his face to the open windows, and looked at the smoke-begrimed square. He wore evening dress, and he had probably never looked better in his life. Those few words which Mr Tremaine had uttered in the morning had awakened in him a wild hope of happiness and freedom, and such hope always improves the looks of a man. Besides this, he had in his pocket a letter from Alice Chepstow ; a letter written half-an-hour after he had left her ; the very first one which she had written to him—precious to him on that account, as well as for the tenderness, truthfulness, and love with which it was filled. He had placed it in the inside pocket of his coat, and with his left arm he persistently pressed that part of the coat to him. It seemed like a part of her ; he could almost believe that he could feel her breathing and hear her voice, mingled with the moaning of the sea.

“ Mr Glamorgan, how do you do ? ”

While Glamorgan had been plunged deep in thoughts of the past, the door had opened and a lady had entered the room. A lady by no means young or fair. Her figure was tall but very thin ; her features were not uncomely, but her face was colourless, its expression hard and somewhat bitter. She had black hair, which was neatly dressed, and she wore a black dress of an exceedingly plain cut. She looked forty—her age was only twenty-seven—and when Glamorgan had left for India ten years before she had been a pretty brunette. Seeing that her entrance was unnoticed, she

stood for a moment and looked at the man ; her face was almost bright when she spoke.

“ I am glad you have come,” she continued, leaving in his palm the cold, thin hand which he had pressed so warmly. “ It is quite pleasant to welcome back such an old friend.”

Suddenly her manner changed ; something in his face turned her into the hard, cold woman again, as she said,—

“ You find me much changed, Mr Glamorgan ? ”

“ My dear Miss Tremaine, ten years is long enough to work changes in us all.”

She seated herself, and for a time the two continued to chat about old times, but some strange barrier had come between them which neither could remove. Presently the lady rose and walked restlessly about the room, while Glamorgan relapsed into his former silence, and allowed his thoughts to wander again to the little Welsh village by the sea ; to the blue-eyed, fair-haired Welsh girl who was sitting in the vicarage, thinking most probably of him.

Meanwhile Dorcas Tremaine, moving restlessly about the room, was experiencing a sickening sense of pain. When Glamorgan had left for India ten years before, Dorcas, after having quietly wished him “ Good-bye,” had crept back to her rooms in the mansion in Bloomsbury Square, and looked around her with a heart as sad as if she had been looking at the dismal trappings of a tomb. She had tried very hard to preserve her secret, and up till that moment she believed that she had preserved it ; but Mr Tremaine, who seemed to note every change of expression on his beloved daughter’s face, soon discovered everything. Had the loss of half his possessions been of

the slightest use to allay her pain, the old gentleman would have made the sacrifice. But he knew it would be useless. Simultaneously, with the knowledge of his daughter's love for Glamorgan, came the discovery of his marriage. But now the woman was dead ; the lawyer believed that Glamorgan was a free man again. He knew also that his daughter had but one ideal—Richard Glamorgan ; but one month out of all the years of her life to think and dream over—the month which had been spent with him.

When Dorcas Tremaine had entered the room that evening her heart had been at very high pressure indeed, but she had controlled herself sufficiently to walk up to the visitor and give him her hand. She had noted the look of gloomy pleasure which, at sight of her, had lighted up his stern, dark features ; she had felt the lingering, tender pressure of his hand ; then something had come between them which had allayed the painful throbbing at her heart and impelled her to walk uneasily about the room. A long silence ensued ; then, to the girl's immense relief, her father came in. The dinner passed gloomily enough ; as soon as it was over, Dorcas Tremaine was glad enough to withdraw and leave her father and his guest alone.

CHAPTER XII.

GLAMORGAN MAKES HIS WILL.

PRESIDENTLY the two men went up to the lawyer's study—a cosily fitted up room, the privacy of which was secured

by two substantial green baize doors. The lawyer took a comfortable chair, and pointed to another, which Glamorgan refused.

“ You have got some English appointment to offer me ? ” he said, standing before the old man.

The lawyer screwed up his eyes, and watched his companion through the lashes.

“ Wrong,” he said curtly. Glamorgan started.

“ I understood this morning—”

“ Certainly you did not understand that, or if you did, you made a mistake. But, before we discuss the advisability of your stopping at home, let me point out to you the folly of your going. Your salary out there will be fifteen hundred a-year ; if you live on five hundred, and send home ten, it will take you at least ten years to free Plas Ruthven ! ”

“ A bankrupt estate cannot be saved in a day ! ”

“ Certainly not ; still, when a man has reached your age, ten years of hard work and exile are not pleasant to contemplate. Now, I know a plan—one that has occurred to me since I suggested your going away—by which you might disembarass Plas Ruthven in four-and-twenty hours, and have at your command means sufficient to live in the house as your ancestors did before you ! ”

“ And the terms ? ”

“ Are what nine men out of ten would grasp at—the companionship of an affectionate wife.”

Glamorgan stared,—then he turned on his heel with a petulant laugh.

“ You refuse ? ” asked the lawyer.

“ Of course. The suggestion came to me, and was refused by me, several months ago.”

The lawyer smiled.

"Of course, and very properly rejected," he said; "because you thought you would have to find the lady, and, having found her, to awaken her interest in the match. There was a hard task before you then; but suppose I told you that the task was over,—suppose I could show you a lady, young and tolerably comely, who liked you well enough to marry you, and whose father would disembarrass the estates the day she took your name?"

"I should still refuse," he said. "And now, Tre-maine, that the farce is over, let us get to business, for the ship sails to-morrow at noon!"

The conversation, however, had so excited the lawyer, that it was some time before he could bring himself to that state of composure necessary to his task. At length he conquered himself and set to work, and while he worked he wondered to himself,—"There is something at the bottom of all this obstinacy," he said to himself. "What can it be?"

In half-an-hour the business was over—so, at least, the lawyer thought; but Glamorgan had another request.

"By the way, I want to make my will!" he said.

Immediately the lawyer was all attention.

Glamorgan proceeded to explain. He had very little to leave,—only two hundred a-year,—Plas Ruthven Manor House and one or two little personal legacies.

The whole of these he bequeathed to Alice Chepstow. Then came the reservation which staggered even Tre-maine,—"To remain the property of the lady aforesaid for the term of her natural life, if she continues to retain

her maiden name ; but should she marry she is to forfeit her right to everything, and the property will pass to the next of kin."

The cunning lawyer put all this down without a word of comment. When the will was signed, witnessed, and sealed, and the two men were alone again, Tremaine quietly, and as if carelessly, asked the *age* of the lady in whose favour the will had been made.

Glamorgan fell into the trap at once.

"About eighteen," said he.

Then he produced from the breast-pocket of his coat a painted miniature, and handed it to his companion. The picture represented the head and shoulders of Alice Chepstow, but so greatly had it been etherealised, that it might have been taken for the picture of a virgin saint, or a Madonna from an early Italian painter.

Tremaine looked at it,—at the dimpled cheeks and chin, the pouting lips, the hair falling upon the shoulders like golden rain, and the dreamy blue eyes, half veiled with their sleepy lids and long dark lashes.

As he looked his eyes grew like steel ; his jaw set. The face had no charm for him, for it represented to him the mortal enemy of his only child.

"And so," he said, without looking up, "this phenomenal young lady is going to wait ten years for you, is she ?"

Glamorgan shuddered.

Ten years from Alice ! As well put him at once in his grave !

"God forbid !" he said. Then he explained to the lawyer the compact that had been made. With knitted brows the old man listened.

"So," he said, with a grim smile, when the tale was done,—"if the young lady comes into your money at all, she will do so before this time next year?"

"Of course. If I live, by this time next year she will be my wife."

"And if you die, by this time next year she will be somebody else's sweetheart!"

The lawyer spoke in a quiet though emphatic tone; the answer was hurled back at him like a thunderbolt.

"It is false!" Glamorgan said. "Do not belie her!"

Tremaine started slightly, but in a moment he grew as composed as ever. His cheek was a shade paler, perhaps, and his lips more tightly pressed together; but he threw himself back in his chair and watched his companion from beneath the drooping lids of his eyes. Glamorgan was walking excitedly up and down the room; he paused before the lawyer's chair.

"Tremaine, I beg your pardon."

The lawyer smiled grimly.

"Not at all, my dear boy; not at all. You are in love, you know!"

"Which is no excuse for one gentleman to be rude to another; but your remark annoyed me. And so you really think," he continued, taking a seat before his companion, "that if I die, Alice's love for me will die also?"

"I am sure of it. It would be a physical impossibility for it to survive! My dear Glamorgan, when I was twenty years of age I was as romantic a youngster as you would find on the face of the earth. I was inclined to do what you have done to-night,—to select a

back unfitted for any burthen, and say, ‘Bear *this*; if you fail for lack of the strength which has never been supplied to you, you shall suffer.’ Well, my period of romance has passed away, and I find myself very much better without its distraction. Common-sense guides me now. If I wanted a van-load of iron drawn into the city, I shouldn’t put a gracefully-formed delicate-limbed race-horse between the shafts; or if I did, I should curse my own stupidity, not the pony’s weakness, when the poor brute broke down half way !”

“Pray, explain your simile. I don’t see the application.”

“It is this, my dear fellow : if you wanted to put such confidence in a girl, who could be widowed as it were at eighteen, and who would (as you hope) possess stability enough to mourn through a long life a man whom, after all, she had only known for a month or so, you should have chosen one with a different frontal development, that is all. As well look for figs to grow upon a grape vine as to expect superhuman strength of character coupled with a face like that !”

So saying, he laid the miniature upon the table, and Glamorgan, taking it up, replaced it in the breast-pocket of his coat.

“Shall we go down to Dorcas ?” asked Tremaine at length, seeing that his friend seemed little inclined for further conversation.

Glamorgan started like one awakening from a dream.

“I am not fit company for any one to-night,” he said ; “you can say ‘good-bye’ for me !”

“As you please ; you start to-morrow, I suppose ?”

“I believe so !”

"You will let us hear of you from time to time, and see you at the expiration of the year. God bless you, my boy!"

The two men shook hands. Tremaine descended gloomily to his drawing-room, and Glamorgan left the house.

There was little pleasure left for the lawyer that night. He sat apart in silence and watched with sorrowful eyes the face and form of his daughter. She was moving restlessly about the room watching for a form which he knew would not appear to her again. And as he looked, there appeared before his eyes a vision of Alice Chepstow, as she had been represented to him in the picture, fair haired, blue-eyed, delicate skinned, looking into her lover's face with a happy, contented smile.

"Pest upon the girl!" he muttered; "would to God she had been strangled at her birth, since she comes to cast such a blight over the life of my darling child!"

Meanwhile Glamorgan, having got clear of the house, walked slowly through some quiet streets, to think over the conversation which had just taken place. He still had Alice's letter in his pocket; he still pressed it lovingly to his heart,—but the words which the lawyer had uttered had stung him to jealousy again.

On arriving at his hotel, he found that the postman had been again, and had left him another letter. Again he recognised Alice's hand. He carried the precious document up to his room and sat down to read it.

"I must write to you once more," wrote Alice, "because, while I am writing, I try to imagine that you are near. The place is so desolate without you! I walk on the sands; but the sea has no music for me now, the washing of the waves is only the dreary moaning of

water which is destined to take you from me. I sit at home, and the rooms look desolate,—the only one which seems like home to me is the one which holds your portrait, love. I stand before it many hours a-day, and when I look up your eyes look down so gravely upon me, and your dear lips seem to say, ‘Do not weary, Alice—my spirit is with you always; yet a little while and I shall come and claim you for my own !’ I think you have my ring, dear Richard—if so, keep it. I have sent Oscar to Mrs Kingston of Mostyn Towers !”

As he read these last words Glamorgan’s face grew woefully dark, and a spasm contracted his heart. It quickly passed away, however ; he folded the letter and put it in his pocket as he muttered reflectively,—

“ These foul suspicions sully her honour and mine. If I were to put her to the test—no man could ever accuse her, and I should never doubt again !”

He left London early the next morning, and sailed in the ship which quitted Gravesend at noon.

C H A P T E R X I I I.

THE WEDDING DRESS.

JUST six months had come and gone since that day when Richard Glamorgan, bright in his own fashion with hope for the future, said “Good-bye” to Alice, and left her to wait for him in the little vicarage by the sea. Six long weary months, which had seemed to the girl like six years,

The sunlight had faded from the earth, the sea had turned to a steel-like grey, the trees, stripped of their foliage, bent pitifully before the biting breath of the chill November wind. It was cold, cheerless weather. Winter had come on early, and its approach had been heralded by one or two black frosts, which had swept over the land like a breath of desolation, to take all hope from the heart of man. Such weather brought hard work to every one, especially to the inmates of the vicarage. Mr Chepstow and Marion had to plod about all day on errands of charity amongst the poor, and Alice was equally hard-worked at home.

But the last day of November, which had come round so quickly, found Alice shut up in one of the rooms at the vicarage with the village dressmaker, working busily at the dresses which were to form her wedding outfit. She had been working very hard for several weeks, and the close confinement, together with excitement and anxiety, were beginning to tell upon her ; her cheek was somewhat paler than usual ; her figure had grown even more slender. In vain had Marion protested that time did not press ; in vain had she pointed out the fact that many long weary months must surely elapse before the gloomy owner of Plas Ruthven could return to ask Alice to wear his bridal ring. The girl's restless excitement must be worked off somehow, and she deemed this the simplest and surest way.

A room had been set apart for the dressmaking, as its condition would show. Fabrics of various hues were piled upon sofas, tables, chairs ; a full length toilette mirror occupied one side of the room, while the sewing machine — the busy hum of which was

heard from morning till night—occupied a prominent place in the window. The hum of the machine had been more persistent than ever one day; but as the shadows began to lengthen, it ceased. The dressmaker rose with a weary sigh.

"There, Miss Alice, that be done," she said, holding up a dress of delicate white satin. "It be pretty enough for any lady in the land, but a mint o' money wouldn't make *me* put it on."

Alice, who had been brought from her work at the other end of the room, looked up at the speaker in dismay.

"Not put it on, Marjorie?" she said. "Why, what is the matter with it?"

"The matter? Nothing in the make; nothing in the cut; nothing in the stuff. I've made for many proud ladies in Ruthven in my time, and none of 'em ever wore a better gown. But 'twas begun on a Friday, and 'tis finished on a Friday, but you would have me do't, so when ill-luck comes don't blame Marjorie Doves."

For a moment Alice was silent. Her lover's ways had made her superstitious, and a horrible foreboding chill crept through all her veins, making her shiver.

"It is my wedding dress," she murmured; then resolutely shaking off the feeling of dread which had seized her, she added, "I will not listen to such nonsense; papa has been preaching against superstition for five-and-thirty years."

Nevertheless, she would not have another dress begun that night; but because the all important one was finished, she gave the dressmaker an extra glass of Marion's cowslip wine, and an extra shilling when she said "Good-night."

The girl gone, Alice locked the workroom door, and went downstairs to see that the rooms were cosy for her father and Marion, whom she looked for every hour. In the kitchen she found all trim and neat—no signs of work or disorder ; the floor and tables were as white as milk, a blazing fire filled the polished grate, and on the hob was singing a copper kettle, which the maid was keeping ready for the tea. Well satisfied with this inspection, Alice went up to the dining - room. Here again she found cosy comfort, cleanliness, neatness, and warmth. The table was spread for tea, a merry crackling fire filled the grate, two cosy-looking arm-chairs were drawn towards it, and Mr Chepstow's embroidered slippers were placed in readiness for him on the goat-skin rug.

The evening was creeping on quickly ; the light in the room was dim. Alice lit the lamp which stood upon the table, and drew the maroon curtains across the windows to shut out what was still left of the light of day. Having done so, she took up a shawl, wrapped it round her head and shoulders, and walked out into the road to see if she could see anything of her father and Marion.

What a contrast the cosy rooms in the vicarage were to the bleak and wintry chilliness of the night ! It had been cold all day, but since sunset the air had grown quite bitter. There was a bleak wind blowing ; the roads were bound hard with ice ; the sky loomed chill and threatening overhead, and thin flakes of snow had begun to fall. With her warm shawl wrapped well about her, she walked quickly up and down the hardened ice-bound road ; gazed at the frozen earth about her, the blackened sky above.

"I wonder why it is," she said to herself, "that I feel so wretchedly out of myself to-night? I wonder if anything is going to happen? I wonder if any one is going to die? I did not like to tell Marion, but during the last three nights I have been persistently awokened from my sleep by the piteous moaning of a dog! I wish Richard would write. It is so long since I heard from him, or it seems so long to me."

The thought of Richard made her turn her eyes towards the home which he had asked her to share. The moon had risen just above it, and looked down from between the clouds of the troubled sky. How dreary the place appeared! The trees bereft of all foliage, the grounds sinking into decay, and the turrets blackened with tempest and the weary rolling on of years. She gazed on. So lost was she in contemplation of the wretched-looking place, that she had not noticed the quiet approach of a man, who now stood within three yards of her.

"Good-night, Miss Chepstow."

With a start she turned quickly, and found herself face to face with the village postman, a rough-looking Welsh lad of eighteen, whose duty it was to bring in the letters night and morning from the post-office, which was in the village of Abergelly, just three miles away.

"Good-night, Owen. Any letters?" she asked, rather eagerly, after her first start of surprise was over.

"Yes, miss, three."

"Give them to me, and go into the kitchen. You shall have a glass of our new ale; it will do you good on such a frosty night."

Gleefully enough the lad handed her the letters, to-

gether with Mr Chepstow's London paper, which came down every night ; then turning his bag round on to his back again, he followed the young lady through the wicket-gate into the vicarage garden.

Alice walked in like one treading on air. She hurried into the parlour, spread out the letters on the table beneath the brightly burning lamp, and looked at each in turn. How blank her face became ! They were all addressed to her father ! One, she knew, contained an invitation to a clerical meeting ; the other his quarter's salary ; the other was directed in a hand which she did not know, but on the seal she read, "J. Tremaine & Son, Solicitors, 143 Chancery Lane."

Compared with the all-important one which she had expected, these letters contained little interest for her. She gathered them up and laid them near her father's plate, together with the paper, which contained his entertainment for the night ; then she filled a horn full of ale, and carried it herself to the kitchen.

"She found the post-boy seated comfortably beside the clean, cosy hearth. His post-bag, cap, and stick lay upon the kitchen table, and he himself, while warming his hands, was gazing in wrapt admiration upon the neat figure and comely face of the pastor's maid. Alice's hands gave the ale, but her eyes were eagerly fixed upon the post-bag.

"You gave me only three letters for papa, Owen !" she said.

"Three letters for his reverence," returned Owen, greedily eyeing his ale ; "that be right, Miss Alice ; but look ye, now, I had the paper as well," and he made for the bag.

"Yes, yes," said Alice, "I got the paper ; but—isn't there a letter for me ?"

Great as was her anxiety on the subject, she exhibited a certain shyness in asking the question—the shyness communicated itself to the post-boy and the servant girl, and for a moment there was a constrained silence. Then the lad said,—

"There beant one for you, miss !"

"No ? Are you quite sure ? May you not have overlooked it ? Shall I take a glance just to satisfy myself, Owen ?"

And without waiting for Owen's permission, she thrust her eager little hand into the canvas bag and drew forth its contents. A sorry lot,—three letters in vari-coloured envelopes, bearing American stamps and addressed in scrawling uneducated hands, to three inhabitants of the village who were known to have prosperous relatives abroad—two letters for Mrs Lubin, the landlady of the principal inn, and several foreign papers. With a quiet sigh Alice returned them to the bag.

"You must bring me one to-morrow, Owen," she said, with a smile ; "or there will be no more October ale," and nodding good-night, she left the youth to the enjoyment of the ale, the society of the maid, and the warmth of the kitchen, while she herself returned to the parlour to await her father's return.

How late he was ! the hands of the clock already pointed to seven, and the hour for afternoon tea at the vicarage was never later than four. If it had been Alice's good fortune to receive the long-expected letter from her lover that night, she would have found the time

pass swiftly enough ; as it was, it dragged so heavily that she was puzzled to know what to do with herself.

At last she hit upon a plan.

"I will try on my wedding dress !" she said.

The idea seemed to be a humorous one ; in a moment her face brightened. She went to Marion's store cupboard, opened a packet belonging to the goods which had come from London the week before, and drew forth four thick wax candles. Armed with these, she ran up to her workroom and locked herself in.

Her first care was to dispose of the candles ; these she placed in various positions around her full-length mirror, and lit them all ; then she collected together all the articles which were to form a part of her wedding costume, and, having undressed, proceeded to array herself as a bride. First came the white silk stockings, with just enough open work in front to give glimpses of the delicate instep—the little white satin shoes, the lissome clinging white satin robe and the embroidered white veil which had covered her mother's blushing face, the day that Mr Chepstow, then a young aspirant to clerical fame, made her his wife. Slowly, tremulously, Alice arrayed herself in these things ; then, when all was completed, she stood amid the flashing lights before the mirror to see the effect.

She started, blushed, and her face lit up with pleasure.

"How nice I look !" she said, with pardonable pride. "How pleased Richard will be when he sees me ! I wonder if papa and Marion have come home yet ? Surely they have,—it must be nearly eight o'clock ! I'll just creep down and walk into the dining-room to give them both a surprise ! "

She gathered up her flowing lace-trimmed train in one hand, with the other held around her shoulders the delicately embroidered veil, and crept on tiptoe downstairs. With the same caution she entered the dining-room, but there was no one there. The maid had evidently been in to put more coal on the fire and turn down the lamp, but neither Mr Chepstow nor Marion had returned.

Having got down, Alice felt loath to go up again without having made her desired effect, so she turned up the lamp, threw out her skirts until they fell gracefully behind her, and stood for a time irresolutely upon the hearth. Presently, tired with waiting, she went forward and looked again idly at her father's letters. Finally she took up the newspaper, tore off the wrapper, and began to glance carelessly at the columns which contained the news of the day.

She read on.

Suddenly she started, her face turned ghastly pale; with cold trembling hands she clutched the paper, sank upon her knees near the table, and proceeded with wild eyes to devour the paragraph, the first glimpse of which had evidently caused her much alarm.

CHAPTER XIV

A SHADOW ON THE HEARTH.

It was through no fault of Mr Chepstow that he was detained abroad that night. Though he was a conscien-

tious man, and loved at all times to do his duty, yet he was not above enjoying such simple pleasures as were afforded to him in this world.

The four o'clock tea at the vicarage with his daughters about him was regarded by him as drifting into quiet waters after a troubled sea. Let the duties of the day be ever so onerous, he always comforted himself with the reflection that at four o'clock Marion, who was the best of house-wives, would be sure to surround him with home comforts, and Alice, the spoilt pet of the family, would sing to him, read to him, or, smoothing back his silver hair and pressing her rosy lips to his brow, kiss away the wrinkles caused by the long day's care.

During his life Mr Chepstow had had his share of trouble, and his greatest trial had been the early loss of the wife whom he had held so dear ; but it seemed to him that, during the latter period of his life, the blessings of God were rained upon him in large increase : every Sunday, as he stood beside the one beloved mound in the churchyard, and thought of the bright beloved faces at home, he turned his troubled face to heaven.

“The crosses of this earth are hard to bear, but Thy mercy is great,” he murmured. “Thy will be done !”

On the day of which we write, the clergyman’s work in the parish had been arduous ; but at four o’clock, wearied both in body and mind, he was fairly on the road towards home. Marion was with him ; she had been down to the village on errands of charity, and, having fallen in with her father, waited to accompany him back. They were walking quickly, for the night was cold, when a wild shouting arrested their steps.

“Hoi ! hillo ! Mr Chepstow, your reverence, stop !”

Turning quickly, they found themselves hotly pursued by a boy, whose hob-nailed shoes rattled along the frosty road, and who wildly waved his cap in the air. They waited until the boy came up.

“Please, your reverence,” he gasped, “you be wanted down at Plas Ruthven. Old Owen Glendower, he have broke his neck and be a-dying.”

Mr Chepstow, whose weary eyes had, two minutes before, been conjuring up a picture of his cosy parlour at home, turned at once, and, still accompanied by Marion, walked towards the place where his aid was required. As they went, they endeavoured, by a few well-applied questions, to extract some information from the panting, excited boy. Thus they learned that old Owen Glendower—who, the reader may remember, was an old and valued servant of Richard Glamorgan, and who had been left in charge of Plas Ruthven during his master’s absence abroad,—had that evening emerged from his dreary prison-house and walked down to the inn to purchase a little spirits to keep out the cold; having got into the cosy bar, he became so enamoured of the good things which it contained that he refreshed himself rather too freely; and on leaving the inn he fell and struck his head dangerously on the stone step before the door.

When the clergyman and his daughter arrived at the inn, they found Owen lying on the sanded floor in the parlour in a state of insensibility. He presented a by no means pleasant sight. He had never been prepossessing; he was very short in stature; he had a deformed figure, one short leg, and a face like a traditional gnome. Indeed, it was generally believed by the super-

stitious that he was not a human creature at all, but that he had been created and left upon the earth by the evil spirits, half terrene, half marine, who inhabited the weed-hung caves by the sea. Although he had spent his life in Plas Ruthven, no one knew much about him. He had occupied his boyhood in knocking about the Plas Ruthven stables ; his manhood in the gloomy house ; and now that old age had crept upon him, and his hideous body was becoming more hideous and shrunken than it had ever been, he hovered about the place like a Troll, and gazed from its decaying windows with evil ghost-like eyes upon any human creature who happened to come near. He seemed a creature of decay and darkness ; his nature cherished an intense dislike for all men, but against Mr Chepstow most of all. For he remembered, although perhaps the good clergyman had quite forgotten, how, on a black and stormy night, many years ago, as he sat watching the beacon which he had set up to misguide storm-tossed ships at sea, he had been pounced upon by the young clergyman, who happened to be abroad, who forced him to extinguish his light, and threatened to prosecute and punish him severely should he ever offend again. The trade which he had practised for some time was thus brought to an end ; but his intense hatred for Mr Chepstow remained. For some time he found no means of gratifying his passion for revenge ; but a few years later, when the clergyman's wife died, old Owen stood on the hill and gazed at the curtained windows of the vicarage with gleeful eyes.

“Look you now, it’s a long lane that’s got no turning,” he muttered, “and your fine spell of luck be coming to an end. It be something for a poor twisted,

stunted creature like me to see *you* broke down. Well, we be all born, but we ain't buried ; troubles be begun, but they ain't ended ; and them that lives longest will see most."

Although the simple clergyman was ignorant of the very malignant feelings entertained against him by this man—he could never bring himself to regard him with trust or confidence ; but to him one man in affliction was the same as another, and he hastened to his relief as eagerly as he would have done to that of his dearest friend.

He found Owen suffering from a severe scalp wound, from which the blood was issuing freely ; he was, therefore, more in need of bodily than spiritual comfort, although the people standing around already looked upon him as a dying man.

Mr Chepstow, having ascertained the state of the invalid, instead of falling on his knees or producing his prayer book, pulled off his coat. Marion threw off her cloak, and the two set to work to staunch the flow of blood and plaster up the wounds. When this was over, when the blood stains were wiped from the face, and everything had been done for the comfort of the suffering man, the clergyman paid for a room and helped to convey him to bed. Having seen him comfortably settled for the night, he pulled on his overcoat and took his leave, promising to be down betimes in the morning.

It was growing late by this time. The night was very dark and the roads so dangerously frozen, that the clergyman and his daughter had to cling together for safety. The roads were very quiet ; but when they had left the inn a hundred yards behind them, they met a solitary

figure coming down the hill. It was the post-boy making his way to the village. Enlivened by the glass of home-brewed ale which he had had at the vicarage, he was singing to relieve the monotony of the road.

Mr Chepstow paused.

"You seem in good spirits, my lad," he said. "Have you been to the vicarage?"

"I have, your reverence. I left you three letters and a paper, and Miss Alice, God bless her, gave me a glass of your new-made ale to keep out the cold. Good-night, your reverence. Good-night, Miss Chepstow."

The boy plodded on towards the village, while Marion and her father again took the road which led to their home. At length their journey came to an end; they stood before the little wicket gate which led into the vicarage garden.

"How it is snowing," said Marion; "look, papa, the hedge is quite white already. You must be cold and quite tired out. I am glad we've got home at last."

They passed through the gate and the garden, and with a small latch-key let themselves in at the front door. Mr Chepstow paused in the hall to hang up his snow-covered hat and coat, but Marion walked towards the dining-room. She reached the threshold, paused, stood petrified for a moment, then ran forward to the hearth. A figure clad in white satin lay prone and speechless before the fire. Marion fell on her knees, lifted the head, kissed the blood-stained lips, felt the cold cheek, the cold hands, then uttered a piercing cry.

"Oh, papa, papa, Alice is dead!"

CHAPTER XV

A MESSAGE FROM THE SEA.

THE cry, uttered in such heart-rending tones, reached Mr Chepstow's ears as he was shaking the snow from his hat in the hall ; he hurried into the dining-room to gaze upon what appeared at first to be the lifeless body of his child. Alice still lay upon the hearth, her head now rested on her sister's lap ; a death-like pallor was on her cheeks, and from her parted lips a thin drop of blood was trickling.

For a moment Mr Chepstow stood bewildered, believing that his daughter's horrified cry was true ; then regaining his presence of mind, he knelt on the hearth and carefully examined his child.

“ She is not dead, Marion,” he said, with a relieved sigh ; “ she has only fainted, my dear. Come, we'll carry her up to her bedroom, and try to recover her there ; the heat of this fire will make her worse. My darling ! my poor dear girl ! ” And Mr Chepstow, who, despite his years, still possessed much of his youthful vigour, lifted Alice from the ground and bore her tenderly to her room. Marion walked before with a candle in her hand, while the maid, who had been attracted by the terrified cries, brought up the procession, holding the dining-room lamp in her trembling grasp.

The episode, alarming as it at first appeared, bore by this time no very serious aspect to those who stood around the bed upon which lay the girl's still lifeless form. Both

Mr Chepstow and Marion, now that they could use their reasoning powers, easily accounted for the accident. It seemed to them that Alice, being overcome by the heat of the room, had fainted, and in falling, had struck her mouth against the fender and cut her lip. Great was their astonishment therefore, when, on recovering consciousness, Alice sat up on the bed, looked wildly at each face in turn, then on seeing the dress she wore, uttered a heart-rending shriek, and fell again lifeless upon the pillow.

This time it seemed that all the skill in the world would not bring her back to consciousness. It was certain that medical aid must be procured, but how? There was only one doctor to be had; he lived in the village which lay three miles away. It was snowing hard by this time. Mr Chepstow knew that the roads were dangerous for walking; he felt tolerably sure he would never succeed in getting any one to ride three miles on such a night. But his child's life was at stake; he felt that he must save it, even at the risk of losing his own.

"Marion, my dear," he said quietly, "are you afraid to be left alone for a little time?"

"No, papa. Why?"

"I'm going for the doctor. I'll send up Mrs Lubin as I pass the inn. Try to bring the poor child round, and keep her up till I return."

And Mr Chepstow, cold and weary as he was with his long day's work, again got on his hat and coat, and hurried down the road which he had trodden scarce half-an-hour before.

The night was black as pitch, the wind swept over the hills in bitter gusts, and as the clergyman went along,

buttoned up to the throat with the collar of his coat turned up, and the brim of his hat turned down, the snow was drifted so thickly into his face that it almost blinded him. After much stumbling and a good deal of trouble he reached the inn, with his face and hands half-frozen, his whole body thickly covered with snow. His appearance in such a plight, and at such an hour, caused some sensation, but no sooner was his sad news told than half-a-dozen men offered to undertake his journey for him. At first he hesitated, then he declined the offers, and asking Mrs Lubin, the landlady, to go up to the vicarage, he mounted the best horse she could give him and rode away into the night.

“Their offers were kind,” he said to himself; “but to-night, old as I am, I’ll travel this journey quicker than any man in the village.”

Meanwhile Marion, left alone in the vicarage, did everything in her power to bring her sister back to consciousness. First she undressed her, and got her to bed; having done this she caused the wedding dress, the satin shoes, silk stockings, and embroidered veil to be carried carefully from the room; for Marion had noticed that, from some unaccountable reason, the sight of these things had made her sister faint again. Then Marion set to work to try and restore consciousness.

While she was thus occupied Mrs Lubin arrived. She was a middle-aged, motherly woman, who had seen a good deal of sickness and death; she at once relieved Marion of her task, and slowly wooed back the life which seemed to be slipping away.

Alice opened her eyes. Marion, kneeling beside the bed, bent forward to kiss her sister’s cheek,

"Alice dear, do you know me? Are you better now?"

Alice did not reply. Marion, looking at her more closely, saw that the eyes, though open, were quite dim and utterly devoid of recognition.

About midnight the clergyman returned, bringing the doctor with him. While the doctor was upstairs with Alice, the clergyman stood musing with his back to the dining-room fire. His clothes were soaked with melted snow, and on coming in contact with the heat of the fire they emitted a thin white steam, which soon enveloped him in a cloud. He took no heed. The three letters which the postman had brought him, still lay as Alice had placed them; but the open paper, which had been crushed beneath her, had been picked up from the ground and thrown, crushed as it was, upon the sofa. The clergyman saw, but he did not heed; his eye was vacant, his thoughts were far away.

The servant came in to lay the cloth for supper. After the arrival of Mrs Lubin at the vicarage, the services of the servant maid had not been required upstairs, so, instead of standing and helplessly wringing her hands, she had set herself to prepare something warm for her master and the doctor, who, she knew, would require it after their bitter ride that night. When she entered the dining room with the cloth thrown over her arm, she was amazed to find her master standing on the hearth in a perfect cloud of steam.

"I beg your pardon, sir; I didn't know you was in the room," she exclaimed, and paused in some confusion; then, looking at the cloud about him, she added, "Hadn't you better take off your wet clothes, your

reverence? I put dry ones on your bed, and lit the candles in your room. I knew you'd be wet and cold, riding many miles on such a night as this."

The clergyman went upstairs to change his clothes, while the servant, left alone, began to speculate as to the cause of Alice's illness that night.

"There must ha' been something," she said to herself; "no over-hot room could have put her into hysterics and made her so bad all of a sudden, for when she come out with that glass of ale she was as well as could be. How sorry she looked when she didn't get a letter! Could that have done it? No! She was reading that paper when she fainted! I wonder if 'twas anything in that? I'll just take a look and see."

She took the crumpled paper, smoothed it out, laid it on the table, and was about to look it over, when the sound of footsteps warned her of some approach. She hastily returned the paper to its place on the sofa, and continued to lay the cloth.

The doctor and the clergyman entered the room together. The doctor sat down in one of the easy-chairs, and the clergyman stood in his favourite attitude with his back to the fire.

"Is she very ill, doctor?" asked Mr Chepstow, gazing anxiously into his companion's face.

The doctor nodded.

"Very ill, I'm sorry to say!"

Silence ensued. The doctor seemed to be thinking in a puzzled way, and the clergyman felt sad and sick at heart.

The servant brought in the supper. Both men sat at the table; the doctor ate heartily, but the clergyman

took nothing. At length the doctor, looking up, encountered the earnest gaze of his companion.

"I am puzzled by this illness, Mr Chepstow," he said ; "it certainly seems to me to have been brought on by some sudden and violent shock to the system. Miss Chepstow tells me that her sister has received no such shock."

"None, that we are aware of."

"Humph ! then you can't account for the attack ?"

"Not unless close confinement and hot rooms would do it. For the last few weeks she has been working away at her wedding dresses and taking no outdoor exercise at all. This afternoon, when Marion and I went to the village, we left her shut up in the work-room with the dressmaker ; when we came home we found her dressed up like a bride, lying insensible on the hearth here. She had evidently put on her wedding dress for us to see, and, while waiting, had been overcome by the heat of the room and fainted."

The doctor looked dubious, but he only said,—

"Was she alone in the house ?"

"No ; Jane was at home."

The doctor turned his eyes towards the servant, who was quietly removing the supper things.

"Do you know," he said, "what Miss Chepstow was doing when she was taken ill ?"

"I don't know for certain, sir, but I think she were reading the paper."

"Reading the paper, eh ?"

The doctor's eye brightened ; he seemed to have found a clue at last. He gazed rather aimlessly about the room, when the paper was put into his hand.

"Here it is, sir," said the girl; "it lay all crushed under Miss Alice, and when she was lifted up she had part of it held fast in her hand."

"Good God!"

The doctor was not listening to the girl. He had been running his eye carelessly over the columns, and now he gazed with painful intensity at one spot.

"Good God!" he exclaimed again; then suddenly remembering that he was not alone, he read the following paragraph aloud:—

"The China and Indian mail brings us an account of a horrible affair in Chinese waters. While the steam tender *Sapphire*, having on board the passengers of the *Windsor Castle*, an English vessel which sails between London and Canton, was proceeding up the estuary to land her passengers at Canton, she was boarded by Chinese pirates. The pirates appear to have come on board as passengers at one of the landing-stages, and as soon as the little vessel steamed well off from land, they threw off their disguises and showed themselves armed to the teeth. A frightful scene of slaughter ensued. The Englishmen fought bravely, but, being unarmed and taken unawares, they were unable to match their murderous foes. The battle ended in the wholesale slaughter of both passengers and crew, including several women and children. The following is a list of those who were on board the tender and who must have perished."

A long list of the dead was added. Not far from the head of the list appeared the well-known name,—

Richard Glamorgan, Esquire, Passenger to Canton.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DEAD MAN'S WILL.

THE days which followed the receipt of the news of Glamorgan's death were sad and gloomy enough. Alice, carefully tended by her sister, lay prostrate on her sick-bed. Mr Chepstow, broken both in health and spirits, sat dejectedly amongst his books, while without the snow fell, the bitter wind blew, and the whole earth seemed to be hardening to stone beneath the chilly touch of frost.

It was a sore blow for every one ; but it seemed to fall hardest upon Marion, since to her share fell the task of comforting her father, tending her sister, and racking her brain to discover the best means of consolation, when at length the eyes of her sister would open and look with perfect recognition into her own.

It was this prospect of Alice recovering consciousness which filled Marion with dread. For she remembered, with bitter anguish and regret, that she had been ever ready to speak against the dead man, and she feared lest the recollection of this might cause her sister to shrink from her now. Ah, well ! it seemed to her that Glamorgan was always destined to bring sorrow ; he had cast trouble upon them during his life, and now at his death it seemed as if his memory would remain like an ominous shadow between the two sisters, to keep their souls apart.

Her first task had been to get the workroom cleared ; to put all the wedding dresses, including the fatal bridal

robe, carefully out of sight and under lock and key. Alice, when she came to herself again, must have nothing about her to remind her of the hideous past. Then Marion went back to her sister, to listen to her ravings, cool her heated brow, moisten her parched lips, and look with tear-dimmed eyes at the frail little body twisted with agony which she was utterly powerless to relieve.

She had sat thus one day until her hot tears blinded her. With a weary heart-broken sigh she walked over to the window and looked out.

The prospect was very dreary ; the earth was covered with snow, a thin sleet was falling, a bitter wind was blowing, and the sky was covered with clouds heavily surcharged with frozen rain. Little cheered at the prospect, Marion was about to turn from the window, when her steps were suddenly arrested. A dogcart drove rapidly along the road and stopped at the vicarage gate.

It contained two figures, both of which were muffled up to the chin. When the horse was brought to a standstill one of the occupants alighted, entered the vicarage garden, and pulled sharply at the front-door bell. A minute or so later the servant tapped softly at the bedroom door, and brought in a card. On the card was printed,—“Mr Joseph Tremaine, 134 Chancery Lane.”

“The gentleman is in the dining-room, miss,” said the girl.

Marion motioned her away.

“Tell him papa will be back in an hour,” she whispered.

“I did, miss, and he says *you'll* do as well.”

"But I cannot see him."

The girl withdrew, and Marion returned to her place by the bedside. Presently the servant returned with another card, on which was written,—

"I do not wish to be importunate, especially at such a time, but it is necessary that I see you for a moment concerning the affairs of the late Mr Glamorgan."

Marion did not hesitate any longer, but leaving the servant to watch by Alice, who had fallen into a feverish sleep, she went downstairs.

She found Mr Tremaine in the dining-room, divested of his snow-covered overcoat;—his hat and gloves were on the table, and he was holding his cold fingers to the fire. She looked at him and felt repulsed, she did not know exactly why; but the small, spare figure, the pinched face, the thin white fingers, all aroused in her a feeling of dislike which she could not repress.

Tremaine did not move as Marion came in, but said quietly,—

"Miss Chepstow, I believe?"

Marion bowed and cast her eyes on the ground. She had been crying, and she did not wish to make a parade of her grief.

"I must apologise for disturbing you at such a time," he continued; "but my business is rather urgent, and my excuse for coming at all must be that I have written twice to Mr Chepstow and received no reply."

Marion was not amazed at this. Her father, a bad correspondent at all times, might be easily excused now. But she did wonder what the lawyer could have to write about. He proceeded to enlighten her. He told her briefly of Glamorgan's will, and then asked her what her

instructions were. But Marion had none to give ; the news of the will both astonished and annoyed her : she was astonished at his making the will in Alice's favour at all ; annoyed that, having done so, he could not implicitly trust her.

She stood for a moment quite dazed by her own emotions, while the lawyer remained silent, with his eyes fixed keenly upon her face.

At last she raised her eyes and met his.

"Has Mr Glamorgan left no relatives," she said, "to whom his property ought to pass?"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"When a gentleman has the power to make a will, we put 'ought' out of the question," he said. "Mr Glamorgan had a few distant relatives in the world, but their claims could not supersede those of his future wife."

There was silence again ; it was broken this time by the lawyer.

"You have no instructions then, Miss Chepstow ?"

"None ; it is most unfortunate my sister being so ill. I must think it over, and discuss it all with my father, before I can talk of it. Were I to speak as I feel at present, I should say that the words of the will made it an insult for my sister to accept the money at all."

"You mean the clause about marriage ? I remember I remonstrated with him at the time. I said it was unjust to make it incumbent upon a child of eighteen to live a single life ; but he was firm, and the clause remained."

Marion was silent ; she did not wish to discuss her sister with this stranger ; so presently Mr Tremaine,

seeing that nothing more was to be got from her, pulled on his gloves, buttoned his great-coat about him, and moved towards the door.

"Perhaps in a day or so you may have thought of something," he said, holding forth his hand. "I shall give myself the pleasure of calling again."

Marion laid her cold fingers for a moment on the gloved hand of the old lawyer.

"I will write, if you please," she said coldly. "Pray do not trouble to come so far again."

"No trouble in the least, I assure you," returned the lawyer dryly. "I expect business will bring me here pretty often henceforth. To tell you the truth, I represent the mortgagee. Miss Chepstow and myself are now the sole and unconditional owners of Plas Ruthven."

"I heartily wish," said Marion quietly, "that my sister's name could be omitted from the ownership altogether."

"Really, my dear young lady," returned the lawyer, grimly smiling, "you have a peculiar way of receiving good news."

"I do not consider it good news, sir. I would rather my sister had been robbed of all her belongings than have her name thus dragged through the dust. But you must excuse me,—I cannot remain longer from my sister's bedside."

So saying, she resolutely put an end to all further conversation by opening the door and showing the lawyer out.

Tremaine's face was very grave when he stepped up into his dogcart again. He was thinking, partly about

what he knew, and partly about what he had gathered from Marion Chepstow.

"She knows more about her sister than she cares to tell," he thought to himself ; "for my own part, I don't like the state of affairs at all. Violent grief, according to my experience, is quickly consoled. Of course the girl is disappointed—what girl in her position wouldn't be disappointed at the sudden loss of a handsome husband, a fine old family seat, and a decent income? The disappointment has been too heavy for her weak nature, and she has broken down ; but she'll rally as quickly, and accept consolation very soon, or my name isn't Joseph Tremaine."

Meanwhile Marion, having closed the front door, ran up again to her sister's room. She dismissed the servant, and again took her seat by the bedside.

Alice lay in a deep sleep, her flushed feverishly-burning cheek pressed against the soft white pillow, her hand, white and thin, clenched convulsively, her lips parched and dry. She slept heavily, but now and then she moved restlessly in her sleep, and murmured her lover's name. Marion bent down to kiss her, and as she did so her tears fell fast.

"My poor sister," she murmured, "God alone knows what suffering is before you yet. Perhaps it might be better if you were never to awake again ! Better—yes, a thousand times !" The words were uttered impulsively at the time, but in after years Marion remembered them, and thought, "How much better it would have been for her and for us all if she had only died !"

In the meantime Marion fully acknowledged to her-

self that, under other conditions, the news which the lawyer brought would have been most acceptable to her. Two hundred pounds a-year and Plas Ruthven House! No mean addition to the income of people who struggled daily and hourly with the poverty which they could not keep from their door.

The income derived by Mr Chepstow from the church was small indeed, and the half of it, small as it was, was always given to the poor. It was no mean occurrence, therefore, for Mr Chepstow and his daughter Marion to walk about during the bitter winter months clad nearly as unseasonably as the poor pinched beings about them. But though they had struggled against poverty, and borne up bravely against bitter trials, they had always contrived to keep the knowledge from Alice. She had been tenderly nurtured during her childhood, she must be tenderly cared for still; so when Marion reluctantly took the small sums from her sister's yearly income—she had always spent them in providing luxuries for Alice which neither she nor her father would share.

But now all was changed; it was upon Alice, the spoilt pet of the family, that all the sacrifice must fall.

"Two hundred a-year," murmured Marion; "just seventy pounds a-year more than papa and I can earn between us; it is a nice sum—but the sacrifice, the sacrifice! Alice must be content to live alone, with nothing but the past to be her comforter, and what a past!—quarrels, jealousy, and bitter distrust, with no gleam of sunshine to look back upon or look forward to—only the consciousness that even in his death he could not wholly trust her!"

At three o'clock Mr Chepstow returned, and up to that time Marion had decided nothing. She ran down to meet her father, put her arms around his neck, and kissed him as he came in.

"Is Alice worse?" he asked at once.

"No worse and no better, dear. She still lies in that heavy feverish sleep."

Mr Chepstow walked straight upstairs to look at her. When he came down again Marion was still in the room. They dined quietly together. When they had finished Marion knelt beside her father, who was seated in his easy-chair.

"You have had a hard day to-day, papa?"

"Much the same as usual, my dear." Then after a pause he added, "I've been to Plas Ruthven to see Owen Glendower."

"How is he?"

"Oh, quite recovered; but poor Glamorgan's death leaves him destitute, so I've offered him a little help."

Marion was silent for a moment, then she told her father what had happened that day.

"I have searched among your papers and found the letters," she said. "Here they are, dear. May I open and read them?"

Mr Chepstow nodded, so she broke the seals one after another and read the letters aloud.

"There you have in writing what I heard from the lawyer this morning," she said. "Now, papa, I want you to decide, for I cannot, what we are to do about this money."

But Mr Chepstow could decide upon nothing.

"It is a question which Alice must settle for herself,"

he said. "Of course, Marion, the two hundred pounds a-year would be very welcome, but I would rather give up double the sum than sacrifice the happiness of any child of mine."

When Mr Chepstow had gone to bed that night, Marion, after several hours' reflection, sat down to her desk and wrote the following letter to Mr Tremaine :—

"SIR,—I have decided the question of the money, and my decision is this,—We will not touch one farthing of it; neither will I accept, on my sister's behalf, the ownership of Plas Ruthven House. But I should be glad if, out of the two hundred pounds a-year bequeathed to my sister, you would pay the annual sum of fifty pounds to Owen Glendower, an old and valued servant of the Glamorgans, who is now living in Plas Ruthven. This old man has some legitimate claim on the money of his dead master; my sister, of course, has none.—Yours truly,
MARION CHEPSTOW."

Two days after the postage of this letter, the lawyer arrived again at the vicarage. He again demanded an interview with Miss Chepstow. He had come to remonstrate with her upon her decision, and to point out the absurdity of it. He had no objection to paying the fifty pounds a-year to Owen Glendower, but he earnestly wished to pay the remaining hundred and fifty to the rightful owner; and after a long argument he got his earnest wish. Marion consented at length to take the money. As to the management of the house, she left that entirely in the lawyer's hands.

"If you can get anybody to come and live in it, do

so, by all means," she said ; "but, for pity's sake, do not receive rent for it ; the person who would consent to remain for one night beneath the roof would deserve a handsome fortune."

"But the old servant lives there, does he not ?"

"Yes, and he will continue to do so, I suppose. My father offered him a home here, but he refused to come. He is an unearthly person, and likes, it seems, to live in an unearthly place."

The lawyer looked keenly at her.

"It is an unearthly, a ghostly, desolate place, I admit," he said, "and yet your young sister had elected to spend there the remaining years of her life."

"Yes ; God knows I do not wish ill to any one. If I could bring poor Richard back to life I would do so at this moment ; and yet, Mr Tremaine, I know that if he had lived he would have made my sister a miserable woman."

"But now that he is dead ?"

"She is wretched, of course, for she loved him ; I am sure of that. But God is merciful, in time He may heal her heart and bring her some peace."

"I hope so," said Tremaine, with a curious look, and then he took his leave.

This second interview with Marion gave the lawyer more satisfaction than the first had done. He had laid bare her inmost heart and read it as one reads a book. He seemed to see into the future, and his eyes gleamed.

As he made his way back to London, reclining comfortably among the cushions of the carriage with his old-fashioned travelling coat wrapped around him, he muttered to himself again and again,—

" You'd bring him back to life, would you ? So would I, Miss Chepstow, so would I. But I would say to him what you would not say, ' Watch and wait, Glamorgan ; watch and wait.' "

CHAPTER XVII.

PHILIP KINGSTON.

PASS over a period of several months—borrow the mantle of Mephistopheles—and fly several hundred miles away. We left Mr Tremaine in England speculating comfortably in a first-class compartment of a railway train. We arrive at a quiet sea-side village in France, where a group of blue-bloused Frenchmen and neatly-shod, white-capped grisettes are standing near the door of the Hôtel de Lion d'Or, waiting for the diligence to come in.

The Hôtel de Lion d'Or is situated in one of the best streets of Troufleurs—that little Norman watering-place which a few years ago was patronised merely by a few struggling artists and weary littérateurs eager for solitude and peace ; but which one day suddenly became famous,—and is now the fashionable resort of worn-out Parisians who, after a season of dissipation, flock down to bathe their weary bodies in the ocean, and brace their jaded nerves with the fresh sea air.

In summer the secluded Norman village is as fashionable in its way as the great French capital is during the

winter season ; and the hotels are hardly big enough to accommodate the busy relays of visitors which are deposited in the streets every night when the diligences come in.

It is one of the events of the day, this coming in of the diligences, which every evening set down their passengers before the door of the hotel. Accordingly, as the golden sunlight turns to burnished red, and the hands of the clock travel rapidly forward, the little group originally collected near the hotel door visibly and rapidly increases. More blue-bloused Frenchmen and white-capped women stroll up ; then one after another come the conveyances from other hotels. The verandah of the hotel gradually fills with groups of men and women in fashionable summer dress—who look about them as eagerly as the groups below.

Presently the diligences drive up and a scene of lively confusion begins.

The influx of visitors to-night is greater than usual, the accommodation at all the hotels and lodging-houses is limited, therefore the confusion is unusually great. There is violent and incessant chattering ; the passengers and the lookers-on hustle each other about ; the luggage gets mixed, and everybody is demanding rooms, which the distracted resident population is unable to supply.

Amidst this maddening confusion one man alone preserves his *sang froid*. He is a passenger by one of the diligences ; and as soon as the vehicle which carried him is brought to a standstill, he steps down, gets possession of a small portmanteau and travelling-bag, hands them to one of the loungers at the door, and tells the man to follow him into the hotel. He had been thoughtful

enough to secure his room beforehand ; so, while his fellow passengers are eagerly clamouring for theirs, he quietly withdraws from the tumult, and goes upstairs to dress for dinner.

When he next makes his appearance it is at the door of the immense *salle à manger*, where the *table d'hôte* is held. The last sound of the bell is just dying away, and the motley gathering which it has assembled together are just seating themselves at the various tables which fill the room. At the door the stranger pauses for a moment and looks quietly at the company ; then he takes his seat at one of the tables, and eats his dinner in silence.

After dinner he goes out on to the balcony, which runs along the front of the hotel and overlooks the sea. The balcony is covered with red carpet and filled with lounges. The young man throws himself into one of these, lights a cigar, and while he smokes it, looks dreamily at the sea.

It is a calm, still, sultry night ; the tide is full and the water glassily calm. One or two red-sailed boats are out on the sea, looking like black specks in the fading light ; numerous figures walk about the shingle near the long white line of bathing machines ; many more stroll steadily up and down the little parade. A few are ladies clad in dinner dresses with warm shawls around their shoulders, or men with grey overcoats drawn over their spotless black ; but the majority are in fantastic sea-side costumes, worn carelessly and cut *à la mode* in the showiest city of the world.

The gloomy young stranger, seated in the balcony, watches all quietly ; while the thin line of smoke

ascends from the end of his cigar, and mingles with the heated atmosphere above him. He had thought he was alone ; most of the inmates of the hotel having retired to the billiard-rooms, the drawing-rooms, or the parade. He is astonished, therefore, when an old French gentleman, who has been watching him for some time, suddenly enters into conversation. They talk together on indifferent subjects for some time. Presently the Frenchman, pointing to the parade, says,—

“It looks pleasant enough there, monsieur ; full of happiness and peace ; and yet every morning a little tragedy is enacted there, which it breaks my heart to see. While my noisy countrymen and women are disporting themselves in the water, and showing off their fine dresses on the parade, I sit here alone and look for a bath-chair, which is sure to make its way quietly through the fashionable crowd. A man pulls it ; a stout lady walks beside it ; and in it sits a child—a mere child—with golden hair and lovely blue eyes ; a pale-cheeked English maiden, with a widow’s bonnet on her head.

The Englishman looks up, but he does not answer. His companion’s careless words must have touched a chord in his bosom, for his heart beats painfully against his side.

The Frenchman continues,—

“The bath-chair is wheeled into the middle of the parade, then it stops. The man keeps his place ; the fat lady takes a seat, and the poor child with all the crape upon her, looks at the sea and cries. Yes, my friend, I have been interested enough in this little group to go down on to the parade and watch them. I have walked

past the bath-chair, looked into the poor child's face and seen the tears fall slowly down her cheeks, and heard her soft breast heave with sobbing. She is pale and weak, but she does not cry for herself. It is some secret trouble which makes her cry, and the trouble is connected with the sea."

For some time the Frenchman chatters on ; but long after he has left the balcony, the Englishman sits with his eyes fixed thoughtfully upon the sea. He still smokes his cigar ; but the beloved narcotic is impotent now to allay the beating of his heart, or the bright warm flush which gradually spreads over both his cheeks.

At last he throws away the weed, heaves a deep sigh, draws a letter from his pocket, steps to the door of the lighted room, which joins the balcony, and opens out a sheet of notepaper, closely written and crossed.

He passes over the first page, turns to the second, and reads as follows :—

"Poor Alice left home this morning, dressed, by a morbid wish of her own, in widow's mourning, and looking the shadow of herself. Marion went with her, but she will return to the vicarage immediately. She had a deal of trouble to induce Alice to go at all. Her only wish, she said, was to dwell among the places where her happy days were spent, and pray to God to die. There is no doubt she feels the blow most keenly, but we all hope that a total change of air and scene will be effectual in allaying the sharpness of her sorrow. She is to stay at a little village in Normandy, with a French lady, who is connected by marriage with the Chepstows, and who, on hearing of Alice's trouble, sent an invitation at once."

He folds the letter, returns it to his pocket, and draws out another.

This time he reads,—

“I have little news to give you, Philip,—little that will interest you. Marion reached home this morning, and the vicarage is now like it was five years ago when Alice was away at school. There is a tablet in the church in commemoration of Richard Glamorgan’s death. I fear the next tablet will be to record the death of Alice, whose heart seems broken.”

Having looked in vain for further information, he returns the letters to his pocket, and steps out again to walk up and down the balcony.

The air is still sultry, but the sky is clear. A bright moon is shining, and around it cluster myriads of stars ; the sea is glassy as a mirror, one or two groups linger on the parade, the darkness and mysterious silence of night are falling like dew upon the earth.

He walks up and down, looking at the moonlit, starlit sky, then he pauses and fixes his eyes again upon the sea.

“A little Norman village,” he says. “Dressed as a widow ; we have been thrown together again, it seems —whether for joy or sorrow, who shall say ! ”

C H A P T E R X V I I I.

A N O L D L E T T E R.

MARION had had hard work to persuade her sister to go from home ; but she had persisted until she succeeded, and in her heart she rejoiced, for she believed that she had done well. She hoped that, once removed from the scene of her sorrow, Alice might be brought, if not to forget, at least to bear her cross with less acute pain ; so having gained her point, Marion settled down to employ her own rather dull life in the vicarage as best she could, looking forward to her sister's letters as the little gleams of sunshine which were to brighten her weary days.

The letters came ; they brought but little sunshine.

Alice opened her heart to her sister, and she alone knew how well wounded that heart had been.

"I try to be happy," wrote Alice ; "but oh, Marion, I think I shall never be happy again. Wherever I go, whatever I do, I seem to hear his voice calling to me to save him. I walk on the shore, and the whole ocean seems stained with his blood. Oh, it is terrible, terrible—sometimes I wish that you had let me die ; it might have been better for you, for me, for us all.

"Last night, dear, I had such a terrible dream. It seemed to me that Richard was not dead ; he entered the room and stood beside my bed and looked at me. It was he, but ah ! how changed. His face was livid like that of a corpse ; there were terrible gashes upon

it, and it was covered with red. He bent down and kissed me ; his lips were cold and death-like, and I felt the wet blood upon my face ; he opened his lips as if to speak to me, but the blood which he had left upon my lips seemed to be suffocating me. I screamed and woke.

“The scream was terrible—it awakened every inmate of the house ; Madame Brock came rushing to me in her night-gown. I told her what had happened ; she took me to her own bed, and said I should not sleep again alone.

“I was not sorry, for I felt cold and dreadfully afraid.

“You see, Marion, we have removed. Madame Brock has let her house for three months to a Parisian family, who have come down for the bathing, and we are here—in a French boarding-house, members of the strangest family circle you ever beheld.

“At first I did not like the idea of the change at all, for I hated the thought of being surrounded by strangers, so madame took a private sitting-room, and I spend much of my time in it. But she is so bright and fond of company, and she dislikes being left alone, so I go down sometimes in the evening just to please her.

“It is very pleasant. The drawing-room windows overlook the parade, which in the evening is the prettiest sight in the village ; but our people remain at home. Some of the gentlemen sit in the balcony and smoke their cigarettes, others remain in the drawing-room to play besique and whist. Madame is fond

of besique, and plays incessantly when she goes downstairs.

"When I walked into the drawing-room to-night she was playing—indeed, they were all occupied, so seeing that I should not be missed, I was about to go back to my room, when I felt a hand touch me on my arm.

"I turned, and saw beside me a little old gentleman from Poland, who has treated me always with the greatest kindness.

"'Come into the balcony, mademoiselle,' he said; 'the air will do you good!'

"I went out with him; we walked two or three times up and down the balcony, then the count paused, took my hand between his and kissed it.

"'Forgive me, mademoiselle,' he said; 'but to-night you look so like my own dead child!'

"'Your child, monsieur?'

"'Yes, my child. She was all I had in the world; but she had a great sorrow, and she died of a broken heart. You have a father, is it not?' he continued; 'you are not left alone?'

"'I have a father and a sister; my father is a clergyman in Wales, my sister keeps house for him; but my mother is dead.'

"Then, I don't know what impelled me to speak, but I told him something of what had happened to me; when I had finished speaking I became conscious again of him. He was stroking my hand, and *crying*.

"'You are killing yourself,' he said; 'just as my poor child did, and you will bring sorrow to your house just as she brought it to mine. Ah, Dieu, if she had but foreseen! She died, and just a few months after, her

mother died with grief, and now, mademoiselle, I am a lonely old man left to wander about the earth ! ah, yes, a very poor weak old man with nothing to look back upon, and before me, no brighter prospect than the grave.'

"I turned and thanked him.

"'You have taught me a wholesome lesson, monsieur,' I said ; 'you are very good.'

"And, Marion, I *do* thank him from my heart. Because a heavy trouble has fallen upon me, why should I also plunge *you* and papa into misery ? I will try to get strong and well again, and come to brighten, if I can, the dear old home.

"Since I wrote last, dear, I have had a great surprise. Who do you think has come to Troufleurs ? None other than our old friend Philip Kingston.

"Some strange freak of fate has brought us together again ; he was merely passing through Troufleurs, and delayed a few days to spend the time with me. He seemed so glad to see me ; he grasped my hand so warmly and spoke with such tender sympathy, that he brought the tears at once to my eyes and made me incapable of saying a word.

"And yet I was really glad to meet him, and for the first time since I left home I felt that I was not dreaming some strange dream.

"We went out together in the sunshine and talked of old times—and he spoke of Richard so nicely, so tenderly, it soothed my heart to hear him. He is very much changed, Marion : from a good-looking youth he has grown into a stalwart, handsome man. Tall, broad-

shouldered, and bronzed with the sun. He is only five years older than I am, and yet he is so fatherly that I feel I could tell him anything without reserve.

"I don't know how I could have treated him so badly in former times—but he has forgiven and evidently forgotten it all.

"Oh, Marion, I am so heart-broken; I do not think there will ever be any happiness for me in this world again.

"I am at home alone; for three days now I have never crossed the threshold; for three days I have not seen Philip Kingston. I will tell you everything—so listen, as if I were whispering in your ear.

"After we first met he was with me continually—when I went out he walked beside my chair; when I came home he strolled round in the evening to sit with me on the balcony, and talked to me—while madame amused herself with her cards.

"Well, it was very pleasant. In listening to him I seemed to forget myself, and for the first time for many months I began to have quiet rest and peaceful dreams.

"But suddenly my day-dream faded and I awoke.

"One night, three nights ago, Philip and I had been sitting in the balcony for hours,—how long we should have continued to sit I do not know,—but at length Madame Brock came out and put her hands on our shoulders.

"Young people, young people, it is no doubt pleasant here, but pleasant things cannot always last. Alice, *ma chère*, it is an hour past your bedtime; the doctor will scold you to-morrow!"

“‘And if you survive it,’ whispered Philip, who held my hand which he had taken to say good-night, ‘you shall have a drive to-morrow. What time will you be ready?’

“‘Ten o’clock,’ I replied, and he departed.

“I went up to my room, but not to sleep. I was excited, and did not know why.

“I walked up and down the room, and wondered at the strength I possessed. I was certainly growing stronger, happier, more like my old self; and as this admission forced itself upon me, my whole soul arose in self revolt, and I shrank back appalled.

“Merciful God, what had I done! Forgotten! no, not that; but I had derived consolation from the very source which *he* most despised. I had alleviated my own pain, as it were, at the risk of causing greater pain to him. A voice whispered in my ear, ‘He is dead; he lies cold and stiff at the bottom of the Chinese seas; he cannot see; he cannot hear.’

“‘If he is dead,’ I whispered, ‘I will be true, and he shall at least rest in peace.’

“I spent a restless, wretched night, and in the morning I would not leave my room. Madame blamed the night air and the balcony, so I said nothing.

“At ten o’clock Philip drove up to the door, a few minutes later he re-emerged from the house and drove away.

“In the evening he called, but I still refused to go down.

“Every day this is repeated. I cannot go out, because I dread to meet him; my terrible dreams are returning to me; oh, I feel so ill and heart-broken.

Would to heaven I lay in the sea by Richard's side !
Oh, Marion, dear sister, may God keep you from such
trouble as he has brought to me."

As Marion Chepstow read this letter she too uttered a fervent prayer.

"God help her!" she said. Was her prayer heard ?

C H A P T E R X I X.

A T M O S T Y N T O W E R S.

"MARION, dear, do not judge me too harshly. I am not wise and strong like you ; and above all, do you remember I never could bear to be left and made to feel lonely, and since that terrible parting with Richard I am worse and worse. Whenever one says 'Good-bye,' my heart seems to whisper, 'Good-bye, *for ever*.'

"Just as I had sealed your last letter, a servant brought a card to me ; on it I read 'Philip Kingston.' I looked—hesitated, was about to refuse to see him, when the servant said,—

"There is something written on the other side, miss.'

"I turned the card and read, in a scrawled pencil scroll,—

"If you can see me, do. I have come to say good-bye.'

"I hesitated no longer; without waiting for another word I hurried downstairs.

"I found Philip alone, looking out of the window; when I entered the room he turned quickly and held out his hand; he started, and fixed his eyes upon my face.

"Alice, what is the matter?" he said quickly.
"Have you been ill?"

"I shook my head. I could not trust myself to speak, for I felt that the least thing would set me crying.

"But you have, Alice," he persisted; "you are wearing yourself into your grave."

I still said nothing. I felt I could not speak. I suppose he misinterpreted my silence, for he came and spoke again.

"I had hoped it might be different to this," he said quietly. "I had hoped that, for the sake of old times, you would suffer me at least to be your friend; but since this cannot be,—since my presence brings you pain, I will say farewell."

"Then he took my hand and kissed it.

"Good-bye, Alice," he said sadly; "good-bye, my dear."

Still I did not speak, but something in his voice stirred me to the very soul. I heard him cross the room and open the door, then I could contain myself no longer. I burst into violent tears. How long I cried I don't know. When I grew calm again I saw Philip still there.

"What is the matter, Alice?" he asked again.

"I wiped my eyes and walked over to the window. I could not look at him.

"I don't know what is the matter," I said. "I am not myself to-day. I have not been myself for some time."

I suppose I cried because I felt lonely at the idea of your going away.'

"And because you are weak and ill?"

"Well, perhaps because of that."

"He remained a short time longer; when he again took my hand, he said, 'Good-night, Alice.'

"I had not the heart to question him again. I did not wish the terrible scene to be repeated, so I merely said, 'Good-night,' and we parted."

A few days later, Marion read in another letter as follows:—

"Philip remains—I think he means to remain—and I am glad."

For several days after the receipt of this last epistle, Alice's letters ceased. Marion was amazed. What could it mean? Was anything taking place which Alice feared to speak of, and if so, could that anything have ought to do with the presence in Troufleurs of Philip Kingston?

Marion sat down to think—to review in her mind the events of the last few months, and to determine what would be the happiest end of all.

"The happiest end of all would be for Alice to marry," said Marion to herself. "If she could be brought to regard the past as an ominous shadow which for one brief space had darkened her life—if she could be brought to marry Philip Kingston and live at the Towers, I for one could not bring myself to regret the day that Richard Glamorgan died."

As it was still early in the afternoon, Marion put on her bonnet and cloak and walked over to Mostyn Towers.

The Towers was a handsome stone-built mansion which stood on the stretch of table-land lying between the village and the sea. It had been bought, together with much of the extensive surrounding property, by Philip Kingston's father, who, having amassed a large fortune by trade, conceived the idea late in life of founding a family name. Two years before the opening of our story the old gentleman died, and by his will the whole of the property, except a few hundreds a-year left to his wife and Philip, was willed to Godfrey, his eldest son. Everybody was amazed at this, and shocked too. Godfrey Kingston, who was he? He had never been seen at Mostyn Towers, except to make a respectful appearance at his father's funeral; the duty over, he again departed from the village, leaving his mother and younger brother in possession of Mostyn Towers. Philip Kingston, the second and youngest son of the family, bore his sad reverse of fortune with a brave heart. He was sorry, not so much because of the hard life it opened out before him, but because he had already fallen in love with the clergyman's youngest daughter; he had hoped to be able to lay a small fortune at her feet; now the most he could offer was one or two hundreds a-year. Alice, as we have shown, declined this offer, and, a few months later, accepted the hand and fortune of the owner of Plas Ruthven. Philip accepted his fate with resignation; he left the village with a full determination to try by hard work and travel to forget and never to trouble her again. But Philip did not find this so easy. Alice's face was engraven on his heart too deeply to be lightly thrust aside; wherever he went her spirit seemed with him. He had but two pictures in his mind—one

the picturesque village by the sea, the other the blue-eyed, fair-haired Welsh girl sitting in the vicarage. But though Philip seemed in a measure resigned to his hard fate, the gossips of the village were not, and it soon came to be averred that had Philip but possessed the half of his brother's fortune, he would not have been sent by Alice to wander about the world alone.

The gossips averred this — Marion Chepstow only thought it. Much as she loved her sister, she could not shake from her mind the idea that Alice might be practical enough to think of worldly comfort as well as love, and that this feeling might have tempted her to cast aside all thoughts of penniless Philip Kingston, and set up in her heart in his stead the gloomy but wealthy owner of Plas Ruthven.

Marion thought over all these things as she walked towards the Towers on that quiet autumn afternoon—thought of them, and acknowledged to herself how mistaken she had been. She knew now that her sister had accepted Richard Glamorgan, not on account of the money which he would bring her, but because of the love which she had given him. She had loved him—Marion felt sure of that—but now, she asked herself, now that the man was dead, how long would that love last? “A girl of eighteen, with Alice's tender, affectionate nature, cannot mourn a man for ever,” she said to herself; “she is a girl who must love and be loved. She would make a tender, affectionate wife, a devoted mother—her youth should be sunny, her old age calmly happy—she would be all this if she married Philip Kingston of the Towers.”

By this time Marion had reached her journey's end,

and was shown at once into the room where Mrs Kingston was sitting. The old lady was at tea, surrounded by Philip's dogs, foremost amongst them being Alice's friend Oscar. There were several open letters on the table ; she pushed them aside as Marion came in.

"Have you heard from Philip lately ?" asked Marion, when the visit was half over.

"Yes, my dear ; I heard from him yesterday—he is still at Troufleurs, but I have written to him to come home !"

"Indeed !"

"Yes, he ought to come—he is master here now. Godfrey has espoused the Romish Church ; he has in fact become a monk, and he has made over every acre of the property to Philip !"

Mrs Kingston spoke quietly, hesitatingly. She had put off this explanation from time to time, because, in fact, she dreaded mentioning her son's change of religion to the clergyman's daughter. Marion was stunned.

"Have you known this long ?" she asked.

"For some months."

"And does—does Philip know of it ?"

"Most certainly. He heard of it several weeks before I did myself ; but we have both kept silent, and endeavoured by every means in our power to induce Godfrey to change his mind."

"And you have failed ?"

"Signally failed. The best thing Philip can do now, as I wrote him yesterday, is to accept his heritage and come home."

"Yes, you are quite right, Philip ought to come home !" said Marion, as she rose to go. "Good-bye,

Mrs Kingston ; it is three o'clock, I think, and papa will soon be home ; now that Alice is away I have to be punctual, you know ! ”

“ Poor Alice, how is she ? In his last few letters Philip has not said — ”

“ She is still very poorly ; but we hope that in time her wound will heal. It was a shocking blow for her ! ”

“ Shocking, shocking ! ”

“ Will you tell Philip that I congratulate him on his good fortune ? ”

“ I will, my dear — but,” and the old lady pressed Marion’s hand affectionately, “ I am sure all this will be as nothing to him — now it comes to him alone ! ”

Marion returned the pressure of the old lady’s hand, but though she could not affect to misunderstand the meaning of her words, she could say nothing, so once more wishing her good-bye she took her leave.

At first she walked quickly ; having got well clear of the house, her speed slackened. How elated she felt ; what wild schemes were working in her brain ! Marion Chepstow was not mercenary, as we have shown ; she did not love money for money’s sake ; she was simply thinking of the welfare of one whom she held dear — when Richard Glamorgan died she could not but feel contented, because she believed it was well for Alice — she rejoiced over the good fortune of Philip Kingston, because she believed that that good fortune might be the means of bringing her sister some brighter and happier days.

“ A fair inheritance,” she said, looking around her. “ A better prospect for Alice than to be shut in a living tomb like Plas Ruthven with a jealous, discon-

tented husband for ever by her side to make her life a hell!"

"Much better—it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good; between you and me, Miss Chepstow, I think it was a lucky day for your sister when poor Glamorgan died."

Marion started, turned quickly round, and found herself face to face with Mr Tremaine. Many months had passed now since the two had met. Marion had almost ceased to remember the lawyer's existence; his sudden appearance at such an hour and in such a place caused her some alarm. But the lawyer was quite self-possessed.

"How do you do, Miss Chepstow?" he said, holding forth his hand. "Pray, don't look so startled. I came to Tregelly to personally superintend some business matters, and am putting up for a night or so at Plas Ruthven. I saw you crossing the marshes alone, and thought I would overtake you just to inquire after—after your sister."

"And to listen to what I had to say?"

"Pardon me, young lady—I am no eavesdropper. I accidentally overheard a portion of what you said, and I agreed with it!"

This time Marion did not answer. She was angry at having her plans discovered—she had taken a strange, unaccountable dislike to the man who had discovered them, and she wished to be alone. She bowed coldly, murmured "Good evening," and walked on. The lawyer, not to be daunted, kept by her side.

"I am on my way to the village," he said, "and will, with your permission, walk with you part of the

way. How is your sister?" he asked again. Marion, compelled to answer, did so curtly enough.

"My sister is quite well!" she replied.

"Quite well?"

"I said so, sir."

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders, but made no further remark. The two went on in silence. Presently Marion again bowed, murmured "Good-night," and took the road which led to the church. The lawyer retraced his steps across the fields. "Quite well," he murmured; "yes, and accepting consolation too, I warrant, while my Dorcas—my poor child—is breaking her heart over the man who lies yonder murdered. But what does the world know of that—what must it know?—nothing! They would be shocked at Dorcas' grief. *She* has no right to put on mourning and pose as a martyr—no, she must sit and break her heart in silence—my hearth must for ever remain desolate while this woman, this shallow-minded fool, can play with love and wretchedness as a child would play with toys, and be pitied and petted by all the world. Plan on, plan on, Miss Chepstow; it is your turn now—but *my* day of reckoning may be at hand!"

Meanwhile Marion, very much disturbed by the chance meeting with the lawyer, walked on steadily towards the church. She entered by the vestry door, sought out and folded up the soiled surplice, and putting it under her cloak, was about to leave the church again by the vestry door. Suddenly she paused.

"I will go and look at his tomb," she said. She left the vestry and walked slowly down the aisle of the church. How still it was! how her measured

footsteps echoed through the building ! and how dim the light was growing—it crept through the windows in flickering streams as if struggling for the life which was fast ebbing away. Marion paused for a moment to look about her at the struggling light—the ominous shadows. She glanced at the empty pews ; but her eye rested steadily upon one. It recalled the past, with all its sadness—all its joy. In that pew she seemed to see her sister, as she had seen her months before, with her bright beautiful face turned upward, full of hope, and her blue eyes looking as it were into a happy future ; beside her sat a figure, tall, powerful, but black as night—*his* face was turned upward also, but his eyes rested upon the fair face of his companion, as if in a wondering dream.

The vision faded before another. It was a starlight night in spring. The earth was quickening with a sense of coming joy—every leaf was unfolding, every flower raising its head, to drink in the cool sweet summer dew. The starlight creeping softly through the church windows, faintly illuminated a figure draped in black, which knelt before the altar rails. The sweet face was again upturned,—the white hands clasped nervously,—the blue eyes dim with tears. For a time the figure knelt in silent, tremulous sorrow, then the cold lips opened to offer up a prayer for the dead.

The visions came and faded, Marion wiped the tears from her eyes and passed on. Again she paused. The light in the church was very dim by this time ; but her memory was good. She saw before her a white marble scroll—but it was from memory that she repeats the words which she knew were written thereon.

RESURGAM!

Sacred to the Memory of
RICHARD GLAMORGAN,

Who was murdered by Chinese Pirates near Changfou, on
the 12th November 188—.

MAY HE REST IN PEACE !

“Amen!” said Marion softly. “Oh, how I wish his body had been found, and quietly buried here!”

She turned as if about to go, then suddenly stopped and listened. It must have been a movement, and yet the church was empty. She listened again; there was no sound. She turned her face again towards the tablet. Her eyes had grown accustomed to the semi-darkness, and she perceived for the first time that she was not alone.

A figure was there, crouching in an attitude of watchfulness against the tomb.

C H A P T E R X X .

IN THE CHURCH.

MARION stood startled, unable for the moment to move or speak.

The figure did not stir—she stepped forward and

touched it on the shoulder; it raised its head and disclosed to her the face of Owen Glendower.

As much amazed as ever, Marion stepped back and looked angrily at the old man. She was annoyed at having got frightened, and at having betrayed her weakness; she was doubly annoyed to think that she was continually watched, and that her private thoughts were constantly surprised.

“What are you doing here?” she asked sharply.

The old man, still without moving, looked straight into her face. Had Marion been herself she must have noticed how wickedly his eyes gleamed; but she was not herself that night.

“What were you doing?” she asked again, rather more sharply than before.

“What was I doing?” he replied curtly; “look ye now, I was doing what *she* ought to be doing. I were saying a prayer for my old master, that lies murdered in them foreign seas!”

The allusion to Alice, coupled with the peculiar tone in which the words were spoken, ruffled Marion’s temper more than ever.

“Leave the church,” she said; “I wish to lock the doors.”

The old man rose to his feet, muttering to himself.

“That’s it, is it?” he said, as he shambled across the floor. “I must leave the church, must I? Ay, old Owen’s of no account now—his master’s dead, and he’s dirt to be trod on, look you now, he must go back to Plas Ruthven and bury hisself, now the master’s gone, where *she* sent him, to the bottom of the sea.”

Pale with anger now, Marion touched the old man on the shoulder.

"You have no right to talk like that. If you miss your master, others miss him too—a thousand times more than you can. You should show your sorrow by respecting the feelings of those he loved so much."

The old man stood looking up into her face with a terribly sinister expression.

"Maybe, maybe," he muttered. "It's all along o' women that men first come to trouble, and through a woman trouble did come to *him* sure enough; and," he added, in a querulous voice, "where be the young miss now? Be she coming home?"

"She will return soon," replied Marion, "and I must warn you to take care how you speak of her. You are eating her bread."

Owen Glendower rolled his head from side to side in savage contradiction.

"I'm eating my master's bread," he said stubbornly, "and it's my master's roof that covers me. I was born nigh Plas Ruthven; and I've lived in Plas Ruthven, man and boy, for fifty years."

So saying, and still muttering ominously to himself, he flitted towards the church door.

More vexed than angry, Marion bit her lip and pointed to the door. Owen went out, she followed, and having securely locked up the edifice, walked quickly towards her home.

She looked at her watch—it was past four o'clock, and growing quite dark. At the vicarage gate she met the post-boy. He took the letters, together with the clergyman's daily paper, from the bag and handed

them to her. She took them, and without once looking at them went into the house. There she found her father ; he had come home several hours before—and was growing seriously alarmed at the protracted absence of Marion. She quickly set his mind at rest, handed him his paper, together with the two letters addressed to him, and having put the others in her pocket, proceeded to make the tea. When the meal was over, and her father was comfortable in his easy-chair, and deep in the columns of the paper, she went up to her own room and began to read her letters. One was from Alice, and ran as follows :—

“ MY DEAREST MARION,—I am better—so much better,—and I have given myself a treat to-day. I have taken out your letters, and read over and over again all you have told me about home. Dear old home ! Those last words of yours have set me longing to come back again—and I think, Marion, I must come soon. Of course, now that I feel stronger I am as happy here as I can ever hope to be in this world ; but there are spots about Tregelly, which will make it henceforth dearer to me a thousand-fold than it has ever been before. I long to see Plas Ruthven, and I long—oh, yes, I long so much to see the tablet placed to his memory in the church. Do not fear for me, dear Marion ; I have passed through the fire, and can now bear the rest with fortitude and resignation.

“ We are still in the boarding-house, and Philip is still in the village ; his goodness to me is still untiring. Augustine has grown very fond of him, and is never contented when he is away. I am afraid I prove a dull companion for her ; but she says Philip makes

amends for all. He pets her dog, and nearly chokes it with sugar; he brings a trap the very day she has a headache and needs a drive, and when she is fidgety, as she sometimes is, he takes me out and amuses me by describing to me how she will recover, and in what condition we shall find her when we get home. You would smile to see them;—when she is at her crewel work, there is Philip holding her scissors—and between while teasing her dog—until she grows quite angry, when he makes me intercede and restore peace. She had promised to ride with him yesterday; they wanted me to join the party, but I pleaded an excuse. I wanted to have a quiet day at home, to *think* and to write a long letter to you.

“‘*C'est bien*,’ said Augustine, ‘as you wish it, you shall stay, but I want my ride, and I go!’

“Unfortunately this morning she had a bilious headache and could not rise. I ordered up her breakfast and wanted to send to Philip, but she strictly forbade me. ‘I cannot miss my ride,’ she said; ‘if I rest, my poor head will get better, and I go.’ Immediately after breakfast she came down, dressed in her habit, but looking very pale. ‘Is your headache better, Augustine?’ I asked, but I saw at once she was not herself, for she answered shortly,—

“‘Yes, much better,’ and waved me away.

“Though she would not admit it, I saw she was still suffering, and I thought it a pity not to counter-order the horses; but I was afraid of getting a reproof if I mentioned it, so I said nothing. Presently Philip and the horses arrived; Philip came up for a minute or so. Augustine said nothing about her headache. She only

asked for his arm as they left the room, and I stepped out on to the balcony to watch them ride away. The groom put Augustine into the saddle. She sat there for a moment with her hand pressed over her eyes, then all of a sudden she released herself from the pommel and sprang to the earth. Two minutes later she re-entered the room on Philip's arm.

"‘My headache has returned,’ she said ; ‘put on your habit and take my place to-day.’

“‘Yes, come,’ said Philip, ‘it is a lovely day ; the air will do you good.’ So I put on my habit, mounted Augustine’s horse, and rode away.

“Well, we rode for an hour or so, and when we returned I felt so well, and, I suppose, looked so well that Philip declared a few rides would be the making of me. So he has brought the horses every day, and we have scoured the country together.

“Augustine leaves here in about a month for Paris ; during the autumn and winter she says Troufleurs goes to sleep, and is not fit for one to exist in. She very generously offered to take me to Paris with her ; indeed, she pressed me very much to go, but I refused. The truth is, Marion, I am longing for a sight of home. Write me, dear, and tell me all the news ; you know what news interests me ; my kind love to papa. I shall have such lots to tell you both when I come home.—Ever, dear Marion, your most affectionate sister,

ALICE.”

Marion read this letter twice ; then she turned to the other, which was written in French. It was from Madame Brock, and being translated, ran as follows :—

"MY VERY DEAR MARION,—It is our letter-writing day. Alice and I are sympathetic in one way at last. We both love to write letters ; we both love to take a day to it ; she has of late behaved well, so I grant her to-day, and take it for myself. My first duty is to you. I fulfil it, and give you an account of my proceedings up to date.

"Well, Marion, I am proud of myself. I am a clever woman ; in my hands your sister is being transformed. When she first came here, as I told you, I could make nothing of her. I worked hard and failed ; I worked harder and failed—instead of melting her into a human being, I seemed to be hardening her into a stone. My hope was changing to despair, my every effort was exhausted. I was ashamed to write to you, ashamed to acknowledge my defeat to myself ; but I had serious thoughts of returning your sister as I had found her, when, at the eleventh hour, help came.

"It came in the shape of a young monsieur.

"Of his coming I at first said nothing, for again in my mind bright hope was succeeded by dull despair. Monsieur Kingston adores her. I saw that at once, but her heart seemed cold and dead. I said to myself, 'He will fail as I have done ;' but I was wrong. He has succeeded in helping me to do what I could never have done single-handed. Do not hope too much, Marion, for, after all, the result of our labour seems small.

"Yet to all outward appearance Alice is changed. She has been induced at last to lay aside the wicked masquerade of the widow ; she can walk and drive and ride ; she has roses in her cheeks ; she can look

at the sea without crying, and she suffers Monsieur Kingston to spend his evenings in our company, because, forsooth, she imagines that I, an old fat woman of forty, am fond of him.

“And he—poor boy—he comes to hold my scissors, and to pet my dog, and otherwise to make himself agreeable to me, because of the slim little figure forever at my side.

“Marion, my child, take the advice of one who has your welfare at heart, and marry Alice to this young man.

“It will be difficult; but what difficulty, if well faced, cannot be overcome. I have paved the way for you I would do more, but she will not permit it.

“I begged her to come to Paris, having first ascertained that if she went he would follow, but she has refused. If she changes her mind I will try to complete my task satisfactorily, if not I leave it to you, and may God speed you, Marie.”

More followed of less general interest.

Marion folded both the letters and put them in her pocket. Her mind was fully made up; her duty seemed clear. She believed that the course she meant to pursue would lead to her sister's happiness, little dreaming it might lead to her destruction, perhaps to her death.

CHAPTER XXI

AN ANNIVERSARY.

TWELVE months have passed away since that memorable day when the news of Richard Glamorgan's murder came to rudely disturb the peace of the inhabitants of the village where he was born. Again the skies are troubled as if with the presage of winter storms ; the trees are leafless, the earth is barren ; a year has past, yet life in the little village flows on as evenly as it would have done if the master of Plas Ruthven had never been born. He has been talked of, mourned over, and forgotten.

But on this day the memory of the dead man recurs to some like a faintly-remembered dream.

The sexton thinks of him.

He enters the church, with frozen fingers and shivering form, to sweep it out for Sunday ; as he proceeds with his work he comes upon Richard's tomb ; there is a wreath of immortelles hanging there, they attract the old man's attention and remind him of the day.

"Poor Master Richard !" he sighs. " Well, well, to think 'tis better nor a year ago !" and with that parting tribute to the dead man's memory he puts him again into the past and proceeds to dust his tomb.

Mrs Lubin the innkeeper remembers him. She notes the day, not as the day when news came of Glamorgan's murder, but as the day on which she believed Alice Chepstow would die. " Ah, what'll *she* be doing, poor girl ? " the landlady murmured. " I doubt it'll be a sorry day for her."

Alice Chepstow thought of him now more than ever, this day of all days in the year.

At seven o'clock in the morning she was in her bedroom looking pale and weary after a sleepless night, sitting half dressed beside the fire which she had kindled with her own hands. There were no tears in her eyes, but on her pale face there was a quiet sadness which spoke of pitiful pain. Her elbows rested on her knees, her face in her hands, her eyes looked blankly before her, not into the future ; about that she knew little, and cared less—it was the past which haunted her ; the blank irrevocable past.

"If I could only have seen him just for five minutes before he died," she murmured ; "if I could but have kissed his lips and held his hand as he passed away, it would not have been quite so hard to bear ; but it was all so terrible, so brutal, and I cannot even have the consolation of standing beside his grave."

Then with a moan she covered her face with her thin white hands.

"Ah, God, how I loved him !" she cried. "Now that he is gone my heart is broken : life will never be the same to me again."

Eight o'clock was the breakfast hour at the vicarage. A few minutes after the clock had struck Alice entered the breakfast-room. She was the last to arrive. Mr Chepstow and Marion were both at the table ; they looked up and started when she came in. Her eyes were still tearless, but there was a deathlike pallor on her cheeks, and her slim figure was wrapped once more in widow's crape.

"Alice," said Marion quickly, "why have you put on that dress?"

"Don't you remember, Marion, it is just a year ago to-day since I heard that he was killed?"

Marion did not answer; but Mr Chepstow, rising from his chair, took Alice in his kind arms.

"Alice, my dear," he said, "we haven't forgotten—but grieve as we will we can never bring Richard back; try to think that, my dear—try not to look so sad and wretched, for when I see your face it almost breaks my heart!"

He patted her golden head and kissed her pale cheek, and looking up into his face, she said,—

"I will try to do as you wish, papa; but I will wear this dress to-day just for the last time!"

The breakfast over, the family separated. Mr Chepstow went to his parish work, Marion to her household duties, and Alice, still arrayed in her widow's dress, set forth from the house alone.

She avoided the high road and chose instinctively the quiet sequestered ways; she shrank from the gaze of the living, for she wanted to be, for that day at least, in the company of the dead. Why she had come forth she did not know; whether she was going she could only dimly determine; but she allowed her feet to carry her whither they would, and they led her to the banks of the river, which rushed tumultuously through Glen Ruthven.

Pausing on the river bank, Alice looked about her. She was more than a mile from human habitation,—and safe here she knew from the sight of a human face. The report in the village was that the Plas Ruthven woods were haunted; they had been haunted previously

by unknown spirits, they were haunted *now* by Richard Glamorgan's ghost. No one would intrude upon her here—she could be alone with her sorrow,—she might cry aloud in her anguish, only the winds would hear.

The day was rapidly advancing; it grew colder and more tempestuous as every hour went by; the sky was black and lowering; the wind cut through the leafless branches of the trees in gusty blasts, and the river, black and swollen with the heavy autumn rains, roared on tumultuously through the glen.

Alice walked slowly onward, keeping now to the narrow footpath which wound along the river's bank. All around her stretched the dreary Plas Ruthven woods, and now and then—in following the wendings of the river—she caught dim glimpses of the house itself.

Walking thus in the well-remembered places, with the wild wind whistling around her, the turbulent water surging at her feet, she suffered her thoughts once more to wander over the desolate past.

Again she paused; her footpath had come to an end; it had led her to the neighbourhood of the Devil's Pool—into whose waters she had gazed so often with wondering eyes, and bated breath, and into whose magic depths she had thrust her trembling hand, when, at Richard's request, she tried to solve the mystery of future years.

How cold it was growing, how the wind shrieked, how the trees groaned, how the turbulent waters roared! Sick at heart, yet too sad for terror, Alice sat on a ledge of rock and gazed with sad but tearless eyes into the river. There had been a time when Alice, listening to the superstitious legends of the river and the pool, had smiled an incredulous smile,—but that time had

long gone by, remorse had succeeded hope, her innocent faith in a beneficent Providence had been shaken to the depths ; superstition had taken root in her heart and remained. As she looked into the waters that day—her mind remaining with the past, was fixed upon the time, which seemed now so long ago, when she had stood there with Richard Glamorgan ; when they had thrust their clasped hands into the water, and seen through its elemental omens—the dark shadow of events which were too surely gathering around the two.

"I half believed it then," she murmured ; "but he would not believe. He said the waters lied. Oh, how he kissed me, how he clasped me ! Ah ! why did I ever let him go away ?"

In her anguish she had uttered her thoughts aloud ; but there was no one by to hear. The wind shrieked more shrilly, the waters arose hissing and foaming from the depths of their rocky beds and heavy rain drops began to fall. A storm, which had been gathering since dawn, was about to break violently over the earth. Alice did not see, or if she did she hardly seemed to heed ; her thoughts were busy again, not with the past but with the present. She was wondering if the waters, which had told her so much, could not tell her more ; since they had foretold the death of her lover, could they not give her now a glimpse of her lover's face ?

It was the one thing she prayed for, the one thing she hungered for night and day. Often at midnight, when all the household slept, she had lain awake with weary eyes and aching heart ; had gazed into the blackness and had moaned aloud, "Come to me, love, just for a little while !" and now she said,—

"Perhaps in this place where we swore eternal love and eternal faith, he will come back just to let me see he loves me and remembers yet!"

She rose to her feet and looked around her; she was quite alone, and to her swift gaze all was much as it had been on that day, now more than eighteen months ago, when she had stood on that spot with her lover. The arches of the bridge had gathered a little more slime; the weeds and coarse grass were perhaps a little thicker on the river's bank, but that was all. She walked down the descent, stepping cautiously from rock to rock until she stood close to the pool.

She looked into the water with hungry eyes, as if expecting to see *his* face. She stooped, and stretching forth her trembling hand, plunged it into the icy pool, murmuring,—

"Richard, Richard, where are you? Come to me, love, now for the last time."

Still trembling, she raised her eyes, now blinded with tears, and glanced again around her. Suddenly she started, withdrew her hand from the water, and stepped hastily back from the pool.

Just above her on the bridge stood the figure of a man.

He seemed old and grey, and leant upon a staff. His face and figure were unfamiliar to her, but he was evidently watching her proceedings with a certain amount of interest.

She looked and looked again. He was far above her, but she could see him distinctly. A broad-brimmed hat partially shaded his face, which was white and worn; his hair and beard were quite grey, his form,

which was tall and gaunt, was wrapped in an old-fashioned cloak. Half leaning over the wall of the bridge, he gazed at her intently and their eyes met.

After that first steady look, Alice hastily turned away her head. She suddenly remembered where she was ; alone in the loneliest part of the Plas Ruthven woods. Springing to her feet, she hurriedly retraced her way up the rocks and gained the footpath by which she had come ; once there, Alice paused to recover her breath, then she turned in sight of the bridge to take another look at the stranger. But he was gone.

C H A P T E R X X I I.

T W O M E N A N D A M A I D.

THE promise which Alice had made to her father on that sad November morning was faithfully kept.

When the day had worn itself out, the widow's robes had been taken off and determinedly put aside, and in resuming her old dress Alice determined to resume also her old contentment, and to become once again the Alice of old. It tried her at first, but for the pain she suffered she had her reward. She saw her sister's face lighten, her father looked happier than he had done for many months before, and all within the house was bright and cheerful. Sometimes, it must be confessed, a feeling of reproach arose within her, but it was quickly suppressed.

"How can it matter what clothes I wear?" she murmured, looking at her dress. "What does it matter what I say or do to make my father happy? *He* is watching over me. *He* is looking into my heart, and he knows that I can never—never forget!"

So, with her sorrow deep buried in her bosom; her strong love and faith to help her on, she blinded all about her and innocently laid the snare for her own destruction.

It happened that, during that winter, the clergyman's work in the village was more arduous than it had ever been before. A kind of slow fever, typhoid in character, broke out; Alice pleaded hard to be allowed to nurse the sufferers, but to this her father determinedly objected.

"It generally attacks the weak, my dear, and since that terrible illness of yours you have never been strong. No, no, let Marion and I do the work; you do your share, by keeping up our spirits when we come home."

"Very well, papa!" said Alice quietly; for she had learned to be as submissive and as docile as a child.

One afternoon, towards the middle of January, Alice sat alone with her father in the sitting-room at the vicarage. He had been hard at work all day, and now with his slippered feet outstretched upon the hearth, he was enjoying the warmth of the fire and the soothing influence of his pipe. Marion was in the kitchen, and, assisted by the maid, was making beef-tea for one of her poorest patients. Alice, after wandering in a restless, uneasy way from room to room, had settled down before the piano and began to play. She continued to touch the keys gently until her father's voice arrested her

"Alice, my dear, come here!" She went over to him, knelt on the hearth beside him, and tenderly smoothed back his snow-white hair. Her face was close to his: he noticed with a pang how pale and sunken her cheeks were, and how sad the look in her eyes. For a moment the mask had dropped, and the sickening sense of pain, which was ever gnawing at her heart, became visible on every lineament of her face. The clergyman was terrified; he knew nothing of her silent agony; he thought of the malignant fever.

"I have been blind," he said; "stupidly blind. Alice, my dear, you must go away!"

"Go away!" she cried in amazement.

"It's not safe for you here, with Marion and I continually among the fever patients; we shall bring the fever home. Mrs Kingston was right; if you stay here you will become infected. I am glad I accepted her invitation. I am glad I told Philip to come for you tomorrow morning!"

Alice opened her eyes in blank amazement. Philip Kingston, her old lover, coming to take her to his mother's house! Her whole soul rose in revolt.

"Papa, you forget," she said; "it is quite impossible; I cannot; I will not go *there*. Marion!" she exclaimed, as her sister came into the room, "tell papa that I cannot possibly go and stay at Mostyn Towers."

But to her amazement and mortification Marion sided with her father.

Alice protested, but her protestations were of no avail. Mr Chepstow, yielding in most things, was firm in this; while Marion strongly supported every word he had to say.

"Very well," said Alice at length; "I'll go for a few days just to please you; but remember it is against my will!"

At twelve o'clock the next day Philip Kingston arrived at the vicarage to take Alice away. He had driven over in one of his own carriages, thinking to take her back in it. She asked him to excuse her, to return by himself, and allow her to follow later in the day.

"Let me leave the carriage for you."

"No, thank you; I would sooner walk."

"And you won't disappoint us? You will be sure to come?"

"I will come."

"Good-bye, then, till to-night. We dine at six."

"Alice, why wouldn't you go in the carriage?" said Marion, when Philip had re-entered the vehicle and driven away. "You will find it a long walk, dear."

"I don't mind that; but I would much rather not go at all."

"Why, Alice?"

"Surely you know why?"

"I thought you liked Mrs Kingston?"

"So I do; but I am not going to Mrs Kingston's. Philip is master of Mostyn Towers. Everything in the house—every acre of land belongs to him."

"Yes," said Marion thoughtfully, "he is a rich man now."

"Have I given you a sufficient reason for not wishing to go?"

"You have given me no reason at all, dear. Because

poor Philip happens to be rich, why should you avoid his mother's house like a pestilence? Besides, you spent days with him abroad, so why avoid him here? And after all, Alice," she added quickly, noting the look of pain which shot across her sister's face, "it's only for a few days, just to satisfy papa. He'll soon get tired of his own company, and want you back again."

About three o'clock that afternoon the two sisters left the vicarage together. They walked in company a certain distance, then they paused to separate. Alice had to go across the marshes to Mostyn Towers. Marion had to visit her sick patients in the village.

"I wish you had brought Jane with you," said Marion, glancing along the road which Alice had to pursue; a desolate road, which, after skirting the Plas Ruthven woods, branched off across marshes more dreary and desolate still. "It is a lonely walk for you, Alice. Shall I come with you?"

"No, don't be afraid," returned Alice, with a forced laugh. "No one will run away with me, and if they do they'll soon repent of their rashness and bring me back again."

"But the marshes are so dreary at this time of the day."

"Nonsense; I am not afraid," and with a last wave of her hand to her sister, Alice turned and went on her way.

She had a very dreary walk before her. It looked drearier than ever that evening. She could hear the sea roaring; she looked at the west where the sun had sunk, and saw the sky growing blacker and blacker. She walked on. She followed the path which skirted

the Plas Ruthven woods, and emerging from the shadow, again faced the road which led across the open marsh.

Pausing here she looked back at the village, which she had left some distance behind. The sky loomed darkly above it; all, even the church and its heaven-pointing spire were fading from her sight. The solemn sun, the dark stillness, awed and depressed her, as turning she entered the flat stretch of cultivated marsh, receiving the last rays of daylight, and surrounded by the shadows of the night.

She had met no one, neither had she heard a stir of life since she had parted with Marion; it certainly was a very dreary road, and she began to feel sorry that she had not brought some one to walk with her at least a part of the way; but it was too late to repent now, so she hastened quickly onward.

The road was rough and narrow, just wide enough for a waggon to pass along, but no wider. In summer it was one of the prettiest roads in Tregelly, for the low hedges which enclosed it on either side were full of the scent of the sweetbriar and the wild rose, while from the fields which stretched beyond came the scent of meadowsweet and coarse hay. In the distance across white desolate flats, only broken here and there by clumps of wood, glimmered the lonely sea.

Many a time had Alice traversed it, both on foot and on horseback, in the old days which seemed now so long ago, before she knew the words distrust and sorrow; before the master of Plas Ruthven came to settle in his dreary home! But with the changing of the seasons the road changed, and as Alice walked along it that night,

it seemed to her the dreariest walk in the whole of the village. The hedges were barren, the fields all black and bare, while around shadows gathered, startling her at every step she took.

She walked rapidly on, and at last, to her great relief, crossed the marshes, and saw in the distance before her the white lodge gate of Mostyn Towers. Tall trees now shadowed the road, intermingling branches here and there and making a roof overhead. Scarcely had she entered their shadow when she heard footsteps behind her.

She paused and listened. As she did so the footsteps ceased.

She walked on, and immediately heard the sounds again.

Feverish and frightened, because her nervous system was already overwrought, she stopped again and looked back.

Then she saw, standing in the centre of the road behind her, about fifty yards distant, the figure of a man.

He stood motionless, with his face turned towards her, but it was too dark to make out either face or form distinctly. She felt suffocating, she could hear the beating of her heart, her whole body seemed to be turning to ice. Then, acting under sudden and perhaps foolish impulse, she turned and ran.

She was young and fleet, and soon drew near the lodge gate; but to her increased terror, as she fled she could hear the footsteps behind her.

The man was running too!

A minute more and she stood panting and quivering

close to the lodge gate. She pushed open the gate and passed in ; she closed it, then she stood and looked trembly at the figure which was rapidly approaching at this moment. He paused and looked back ; Alice waited. He must pass her now or else take the only alternative left him, retrace his steps along the lane straight to the village ; was he going to do this ? He retraced a few steps of the way—he paused again, then he turned and walked steadily onward, right towards the gate where Alice stood.

He must come within a few yards of her. He did so. As he passed close before her he was arrested by the sound of her voice.

“Good-night,” said Alice quietly.

Scarcely had her words died upon her lips when a strange white face was turned towards her, a gruff, almost unearthly voice answered her “good-night,” and she recognises, with a new shock of surprise, the man who some days before had stood upon the bridge and watched her as she plunged her hands into the Devil’s Pool.

In another moment he was gone.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE TENANT OF PLAS RUTHVEN.

SHE had no time for further reflection ; the moment the man passed the gate she fled swiftly up the avenue, and she stood now in the spacious hall of Mostyn Towers.

A hearty kiss upon the cheek, and a hearty handshake from the old lady, and she found herself handed over to the care of Mrs Kingston's maid.

"Emily, show Miss Chepstow to her room. Make haste and take off your bonnet, my dear ; dinner is all ready, and I am sure you must be hungry after your long miserable walk across the marshes ?"

Alice returned the kiss and the handshake, then she turned to follow the maid.

The very best room in the house had been prepared for Alice. The large old-fashioned grate was filled with a fire which sent its flames half up the chimney, the dog Oscar, who, though banished, still pined for his long-lost mistress, had possession of the hearth, and rested his head lovingly upon the slippers which stood warming before the fire ; the old oaken ceiling and polished furniture upon which the firelight played, seemed to give her welcome as to a home.

Alice hardly noticed these things. She sat down before the fire ; she held forth her cold fingers ; she patted Oscar's shaggy head when he rose to lick her hand ; she looked thoughtfully upon the burning coal, but her mind was far away. It was with the man who had followed her across the marshes that night. She looked in the fire and saw his face, as she had seen it under the cold light of the stars.

"Strange," she murmured ; "I am growing very fanciful."

"Will you change your dress, Miss Alice, or will you wear the one you have ?"

"Mrs Kingston said I need not dress," she answered.

The dress which she wore was of sombre hue, but it

seemed to suit her better than any dress which she had ever worn. It had been made for her in France by the dressmaker of her French relative, and it had been fortunate enough to please even the Frenchwoman's taste. The soft, dark material falling into natural graceful folds, indicated every outline of the slim graceful figure, and formed a striking contrast to the pale, grave face and coils of glistening hair. "She is more beautiful than ever," thought the maid as she passed out of the room. "She looks like the Madonna."

In the drawing-room Alice found her hostess and her son Philip Kingston. Philip had been lounging on a sofa; he rose with alacrity when Alice came in; but she was taken possession of by his mother, who at once led the way into the dining-room.

Mrs Kingston glanced at the girl's pale cheeks with a sigh.

"Your walk over the fields ought to have given you more roses, my dear," she said; "ah, well, perhaps the walk was too much for you. I mustn't allow these long rambles, now that you are under my care."

Alice was silent; in silence too she sat down to eat. When the dinner was nearly over she raised her eyes from the plate upon which she had been thoughtfully gazing, and encountered those of Mrs Kingston.

"Do you know," she said carelessly, "that since I left home to-night I have had a disagreeable adventure?"

"Indeed?"

"Yes; a man, totally unknown to me, persisted in following me, and alarmed me greatly. He appeared like a ghost in the middle of the marshes, and followed me to the end of the avenue here!"

"Is that so very extraordinary?" said Philip; "perhaps he was going the same way."

"Ah, but you don't understand," continued Alice quietly. "I can smile at it now, and call it an adventure, you see, but I was very frightened at the time. At first I thought it might be, as you say, but his conduct put it out of the question. He dogged me like a spy. When I paused he paused; when I ran he ran too; at last I summoned up courage and paused at the lodge gate. Then, to my surprise, I saw, instead of a common ruffian, a strange-looking old man with snowy hair and the face of a ghost. The oddest thing about it was that I recognised him from having seen him once before; but he is a perfect stranger to me, that was why I thought it so peculiar that he should follow me."

"Pray, describe him more closely," said Philip.

"Tall and thin, with a wild white face and grey hair and beard. He walked with a stick; wore a funny-looking old-fashioned cloak, and a broad-brimmed hat. He looked just like he did when I met him some time ago."

"And where was that?"

"In the Plas Ruthven woods."

Philip rose from his seat and bent anxiously over the astonished girl.

"Alice," he said earnestly, "promise me you'll never roam there alone again, and—"

"Why, Philip, do *you* know the man?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"From your description I should say it was the new tenant of Plas Ruthven!"

The new tenant of Plas Ruthven ? It seemed strange to Alice that she had not guessed this before. She knew that Plas Ruthven was let ; Marion had told her so, but beyond this the old house had not been mentioned, and Alice had been too much engrossed by her own troubles to make careless inquiries about a stranger. But the odd conduct of the man now awakened a new interest.

“The new tenant of Plas Ruthven ?” she repeated thoughtfully. “You think it is the same ? You have seen him ?”

“Only once, though I have heard much of his doings. He is a strange creature, I believe,—old and crusty ; he allows no one to visit him, and seldom leaves the Plas Ruthven grounds except for an evening walk.”

“But why should he follow *me* ?” exclaimed Alice.

“Heaven knows ! Perhaps your timidity caused you to mistake his purpose. But the old fellow is notoriously eccentric—he has lived a long time abroad, where he had a sunstroke or something of that sort.”

“Now I remember,” said Alice ; “papa called one day, and was informed by old Owen that the gentleman was too unwell to see strangers. And he never comes to church. How dreadful it is to be so old, and to live all alone !”

Presently they adjourned to the drawing-room—a spacious modern chamber, with French windows opening on the lawn. Alice took a low seat near the window, looking out on the garden, now flooded with moonlight ; while Philip, who was fond of music and played well, sat down to the piano and rattled off some lively French music.

Suddenly she sprang to her feet with a scream, pointing to the window.

"Philip! Mrs Kingston! Look!"

In a moment the young man was at her side.

"Look there!" continued Alice, now white as death. "I saw that man's face again. It was pressed close up against the window."

"My dear," cried the old lady, "you are dreaming. You see there is no one there."

"He was there, I tell you, and he must be outside now. Quick, Philip, open the window."

Philip obeyed her and leapt out on to the lawn. There he paused, looking and listening, but no one was to be seen.

"Come and see for yourself, Alice," he said quietly; "there is no one here."

She walked out, keeping close to Philip's side, and looked timidly around. How dark it was, how bitterly cold, how dreary. She saw the black clouds drifting tumultuously across a troubled sky; she heard the faint murmur of the sea washing wearily upon the shore, but she saw and heard no more. When she turned back she felt herself trembling from head to foot with the touch of the frozen air.

No, there is no one," she said. "Perhaps it was my fancy—nothing more."

The six days, which had been mentioned as the limit of Alice's stay at Mostyn Towers, had been extended to twelve, and still she lingered. Not from any strong wish of her own—she was simply submissive to the will of those about her.

Meantime small episodes merged themselves into great ones. Ere the second day had passed over her head in Mostyn Towers, Alice had ceased to think of the strange incidents which had happened on the day of her journey thither ; her thoughts were now occupied solely with her father and sister and the pitiful sufferers who became their constant care. It was a terrible time ; the shadow of death had indeed descended upon the village ; the whole air was polluted with pestilence ; the death bell was for ever tolling, and the villagers were continually bringing forth their dead.

Alice, left to herself pretty much, spent her time in solitary rambles thinking over all those things. Though her hands were not busy amongst the sufferers, her purse was open and every penny of her money was given for their relief. Thus it was that, being so occupied with changes in the village, she forgot to notice those which were working around her ; she walked along her path of life in quiet unconsciousness, until one day an event happened, which in itself was startling enough to dispel her dream and change her whole course of life.

She was wandering that afternoon on the sands by the sea. Her thoughts were far away in the village, but her eyes followed the gambols of Oscar the dog, which was now her constant companion. Suddenly she heard a quick step upon the shingle. She turned and beheld Philip Kingston.

His sudden appearance did not startle her,—it hardly seemed to arouse her from the thoughts which held possession of her brain. She gave him her hand in silence ; he took it and placed it on his arm.

"Have you finished your walk ?" he said.

"Yes."

"Then we will stroll home together. I thought I should find you here, that is why I came; it is not right for you to roam about these lonely roads by yourself," he added softly. "You want some one to take care of you, Alice!"

The old name came familiarly to his lips that night; it sounded familiarly on her ears, but Alice said nothing, her thoughts were still busy far away. They left the beach together and turned into a footpath which cut across the marshes and led to Mostyn Towers. For a time they walked on in silence; Alice was the first to speak.

"Have you been to the village to-day?"

"Yes."

"Did you see papa?"

"No, but I saw Marion. She says the fever seems still on the increase. She asked me to induce you to remain at Mostyn Towers. I promised in your name that you would."

"Oh, Philip, you should not have done that!"

"Why not, Alice? Are you not happy here?"

She turned away her head, for at his words her eyes filled with tears. Happy! Could she ever look for happiness until she closed her eyes and slept that last long sleep, which her lover was wrapped in now?

"Alice, speak to me; you are not angry?"

"No," she answered quietly, "I am not angry; you are all so very kind to me."

"Then say that you will remain. It is not safe for you to be in the vicarage, now."

She smiled wearily.

"That is what they all say. They forget it is as safe for me as it is for Marion. If one of us must die, why, let death come my way. I have little left to live for now."

As she spoke she withdrew her hand from his arm. She sat down upon a stile and rested her weary head upon her hand, for she felt sick and faint. The young man stood beside her, while the dog gamboled about the field.

"Alice."

She raised her head ; she lifted her eyes, still dim with tears, and gazed sadly into his face.

Suddenly her pale cheeks flushed ; she rose excitedly to her feet and moved a few steps away.

"Do not let us linger," she said ; "the night is coming on ! "

In a moment the young man was beside her. Again he held her hands in his—again he gazed into her pale sad face.

"You have guessed my thoughts," he said. "Yes, Alice, I love you ; I have never ceased to love you. Once more, my darling, will you be my wife ? "

His words were uttered fervently, passionately. He held forth his arms as if to embrace her, but the girl drew back and covered her eyes with a low, sobbing moan.

"Oh, Philip, do not ask me *that*," she said.

"Why not, my darling ? To me you are the same as you ever were, as you always will be. We have both suffered. Let me help to bring you happiness now."

She had regained some of her calmness by this time.

She listened quietly while he spoke, and when he ceased she laid her hand tenderly upon his arm.

"Oh, how good you are," she said ; "but I have known, ever since the day they brought me news that he was dead, that I can never marry. No, no, never speak of it again!"

C H A P T E R X X I V.

"I HAVE SEEN HIS SPIRIT."

ABOUT mid-day the next day, Alice, looking pale and terrified, appeared unexpectedly at the vicarage. At sight of her sister, Marion started up in amazement.

"Alice!" she exclaimed, "why are you here?" And Alice quietly replied,—

"I have come home, Marie—that is all."

She walked up to the fire ; she sat down and held her fingers over the blaze ; her hands trembled violently, either from cold or some strange agitation which seemed to shake her frame. What was the matter—what had happened? Had the pitiless fever searched her out to add to its list of victims? Marion knelt down upon the hearth-rug and chafed her sister's hands ; she took the weary head upon her shoulder and stroked the pale thin cheek.

"What is the matter, Alice?" she said. "Surely you are not ill ; it would break papa's heart to have you laid up."

"No, Marion, I am not ill," she said ; "listen, dear, and I will tell you. I have seen *his* spirit!"

“Alice !”

Marion started, and instinctively let go the cold white hands ; but Alice did not move.

“It is true,” she said firmly ; “quite true, I saw him, Marion, as plainly as I see you now ; and I knew him,—oh, yes, I knew him,—as if I could ever forget !”

As Alice ceased speaking, she dropped her cheek upon her hand and gazed vacantly into the fire, as if she looked upon another vision. Marion watched her in silence, utterly puzzled as to what it all meant.

“What strange fancies. When did you see him, Alice?”

“Last night.”

“Last night, dear ?”

“Yes. I had been out on the sands all the afternoon, and just as I thought of walking back I was joined by Philip Kingston. We went home together, and on the way Philip spoke of things which agitated me very much, and made us refer to the past. When we reached the lodge gate I was so much beside myself, that I wanted to shake hands and come straight home. He would not hear of it, so, in order to please him whom I had pained so much, I consented to stay ; and I did not repent my decision. The evening spent in the cosy, well-lit rooms of the Towers had a most beneficial effect upon me, and when, at eleven o’clock, we three rose to shake hands for the night, I felt calmer and more contented than I had done for many days before. I went to my room, but not to sleep ; once alone I felt my thoughts inclined to flow back to the theme which I had talked of with Philip that afternoon, and I let them have their way. My room was cosy, the gas burnt brightly, and there was a cheerful winter fire. For a time I sat by the fire

thinking, then I grew restless again. I went to my dress which I had just taken off, and took from the pocket a little bundle of letters—*his* letters, Marion—the very last he ever wrote to me!"

"Well, dear, what next?"

"Well, possessed of my letters, I returned to my seat by the fire and read them one by one; then I put them back in their place and thought I would try to sleep. My head was aching terribly; but for a long time I could not close my eyes. I heard the clock in the hall strike one, and soon after that I must have fallen into a doze. I slept and had a terrible dream; so horrible was it, I thought it would kill me before I could wake. At last, with a stifled scream, I started up in bed, and knew I had been dreaming.

"I had turned the gas low, but not quite out—it burnt now in a little blue flame. I started up to turn up the light, when the blue flame flickered and faded. The room was now in total darkness, for every spark of fire had died out of the grate, and I did not know where to lay my hand upon a light. I put on my dressing-gown, and sat for a time shivering upon the bed. I still felt terribly nervous, and the night was bitterly cold. My head still ached horribly; my eyes were burning, but I dared not think of sleep. The memory of my dream was still vivid, and the thought of it turned me heart-sick. So I sat on the bed in the cold, dark room and cried,—yes, Marion, I could not help it; although it is so long ago, I cried and sobbed as bitterly as if he had just died."

Marion clasped her closely to her.

"It was my fault, dear. You ought to have been at home with me. But tell me what happened next, Alice."

"The dense darkness in the room terrified me. I thought of one way of obtaining light. I knew it must be bright moonlight. I walked over to the window drew aside the curtain, and raised the sash. It was freezing bitterly, but both moon and stars were bright ; by their light I could see the land all around me, and the distant silvern glimmer of the sea. I was glad of the change. I liked the moonlight, and although it was freezing very bitterly, I did not seem to mind the keen cold air. I took a chair by the window, and rested my aching head against the sill. I closed my eyes—grown cooler now through the gratifying touch of the wind, and listened to the faint, far-off murmur of the sea. But suddenly, Marion, I started, and with wild palpitating heart listened again. I had heard a sound—not the sighing of the wind or the moaning of the distant sea. It was a pitiful human cry—so sorrowful, so heart-breaking it rent my heart to hear. It cried, 'Alice, Alice, have you forgotten me ?'"

"You had been dreaming, Alice ! The sighing of the wind had lulled you to sleep again."

"I had not been sleeping. I was not dreaming ; it was a voice—*his* voice, coming to me from the grave."

"Did you hear the cry again ?"

"No ; but something followed which was stranger still. I resumed my seat. I rested my head again against the window sill and listened. Everything was still now. The sea seemed to cease its moaning, the wind its eerie cry—it was as if Nature had hushed itself and trembled in strange suspense. A cold shiver passed over me. The air seemed clammy like the air of a charnel-house. I felt that something was going to happen ;

but some strange superhuman power paralysed my limbs and held me to my seat. I remained gazing in silence at the night. The moon and stars grew brighter. I turned my head to look again at the palpitating sea, when I saw a form—*his* form, standing there in the moonlight. Suddenly he turned, stretched forth his arms, and raised his face to mine. Oh, Marion, imagine what I felt! There was his face, not as I had seen it, but just as it must have been when they found him dead. It was ghastly with the hues of death, and the lips looked cold and blue."

"Well, Alice, what did you do?"

"I don't know. I cannot remember. The next thing that I recollect is being free of the house and walking wildly about the moonlit grounds. I suppose I must have come out of the house in search of Richard. I felt like a mad-woman. I thought I was going mad: the supernatural effects in the air were telling upon me; my head was whirling round. After a vain search I again entered the house, crept up to my room, and sat down again near the window. For many hours I kept my watch; but I saw and heard no more."

As Alice finished speaking, she crept nearer to the fire, and, sighing wearily, again dropped her aching head upon her hand. The tears, which hitherto excitement had driven from her eyes, came unbidden now—they flowed freely, they seemed to ease her troubled aching heart.

"Oh, Marie, Marie," she said, "God is very cruel. I think this trouble is getting to be more than I can bear."

"Don't cry, dear, don't cry!"

But for a time, at least, Alice cried on. She was ex-

hausted both in body and spirit, and it was a relief to feel, after the terrors of the night before, that her sister's arms were about her, to know that at any rate some human creature was at hand.

And Marion, holding her sister's head upon her shoulder, clasping her trembling hand, reviewed in her own mind the story which Alice had told. What did it mean—to what did it all tend? That Alice had really seen a face or heard a voice, she did not for a moment believe—they were both illusions. But illusions might return at any moment—perhaps under more trying circumstances. Alice's nervous system, unable to bear the constant shocks, would become shattered, and illness, perhaps death, might be the result. Yes, Marion saw the evil—the task she set herself was how to avoid it. She could think of no better means than those which she had planned already.

"Yes," she said to herself, "the child is not fit to live alone; she must marry—she must become Philip Kingston's wife."

CHAPTER XXV

THE DEATH WATCH.

If the last of the Glamorgans had not been mercilessly put to death, the inhabitants of Tregelly would have avowed that some dire calamity was about to fall upon the bearer of the ill-fated name. The dreary old mansion, which had always been an object of fear to

the people, was now regarded by them with positive dread, for it seemed to them it was eternally peopled with spirits from the other world. No one could pass it after nightfall without seeing strange lights glancing from its dirt-encrusted windows, and wild unearthly faces peering through the panes; strange voices were heard in the woods, and, above all, the face of Richard himself, distorted and terrible, had twice been seen looking through the window of his favourite room. "The Glamorgans are in revolt," the villagers said. "Mr Richard's spirit will never rest until his body is brought from the foreign sea and laid beside his ancestors at Plas Ruthven."

The only person whom these wild reports did not affect was the man whom they should have affected most strangely—the tenant of Plas Ruthven.

When it was first announced that the old house was let, it was given out as the general opinion of the villagers that the new tenant must be mad. None but a madman, they averred, would take up his abode in a ramshackle dwelling like Plas Ruthven. A house, moreover, surrounded by gloom and peopled with the restless dead; and scarcely had the man been a week in the building when the opinion concerning him became confirmed. Yes, he was mad, everybody said so; and old Owen Glendower, crawling from his gloomy abode, heard the general opinion and told many wild stories of his master, which confirmed it beyond a doubt.

"Mad!" said Owen. "Yes, in course he's mad; but look you now, that don't matter to you nor to me. He pays his rent to the lawyer. He don't mind the ghosts,—he rather likes 'em; he don't like the daylight, but he

does like the darkness ; he don't interfere with nobody, and all he asks anybody to do is to let him alone ! ”

The theory of his madness being established, no one was astonished at his actions ; and he certainly did strange things. Take one example out of many.

The sexton—remaining in the church several hours beyond his time one night—was astonished to see the strange gentleman enter, walk up to Richard Glamorgan’s tomb and give a wild laugh as he looked at it ; a wreath of violets, in the last stages of decay, still hung there. The man plucked them irritably from their place. This was too much—the sexton stepped forward to interfere.

“ Your pardon, sir,” he said ; “ but ’tis forbid to touch those flowers ! ”

The man turned fiercely upon him.

“ Begone ! ” he said. “ I want no spies at my heels. Leave the church.”

“ Not I, master. I’m the sexton of this church. I stop while you stop, and lock it when you go ! ”

The old gentleman turned again to the tomb, and held out the wreath of withered flowers before the sexton’s eyes.

“ Tell me, old man,” he said, “ why was this damned mockery hung there, and by whom ? ”

The sexton started ; was about to resent this speech, when he suddenly remembered that he was talking to a lunatic.

“ Them flowers was put there,” he said, “ in loving memory of him that’s gone, Mr Richard Glamorgan of Plas Ruthven.”

“ Who put them there ? ”

"Her that was to have been his wife, Miss Alice Chepstow."

The man shivered, and threw the flowers hastily from him.

"Why don't you cast them forth?" he said, as the old sexton walked forward, and lifting them with something of reverence in his touch, replaced them in their niche in the tomb. "You say it is sacrilege to touch the flowers. It is rather sacrilege to keep them there when they are withered, and when the woman who brought them thinks of them and of the tomb no more."

So saying, the old gentleman walked out of the church and down the hill; the sexton at a safe distance following him. He entered the vicarage gate. Was he going to pay the clergyman a visit? No,—he was only going to play the spy upon the clergyman's family.

The sitting-room usually used by the Chepstows was situated in the front of the house; the window on that evening was uncurtained; it revealed to the stranger who stood before it a sight which should have gladdened any man's heart. The hour for tea was long past,—on the table stood a couple of decanters, some glasses, and a biscuit tray. The clergyman, taking a well-earned rest, had stretched his slippered feet out on the hearth, and was lounging, pipe in mouth, in a comfortable easy-chair; next to him, looking more motherly than ever that night, sat Marion, her attention divided between a coarse woollen stocking which she was knitting, and the bright copper kettle which was singing on the hob. The third member of the party was a handsome man of some thirty years, who seemed to hold his place as one of the family, who lounged contentedly in the second easy-chair, who apparently listened with courtesy to the clergyman,

but whose whole attention was fixed upon a group on the hearth-rug, consisting of a young girl and a dog. The dog, a huge, gentle-eyed, shaggy-coated creature, was none other than Oscar, Alice's old friend, while the young girl kneeling beside him, passing her white hand down his shaggy coat, was the gentle mistress whom Oscar loved so well.

How pretty Alice looked that night ; her cheeks, usually so pale, were flushed with the warmth of the fire ; her eyes sparkled, and her dark dress formed a pleasant relief to the beautiful golden hair. Philip Kingston bent forward in his chair, carelessly pulled at the dog's long ears ; the animal uttered a howl ; the young man's hands were immediately seized ; Alice held them. She lifted her face, he lowered his ; they were talking together.

The man standing quietly outside the window noted all this ; then he turned away. His movement had been so swift, so abrupt, that he came face to face with the sexton at the vicarage gate.

“ Damnation. Ah ! it's you is it ? playing the spy on me again ! ”

In any lonely place this fierce onslaught, coming as it did from the lips of an acknowledged madman, might have frightened the sexton, who was an old and a feeble man, and he would assuredly have adopted a soothing tone ; now, however, feeling courageous in the consciousness of having help at hand, he stood his ground.

“ I've got more right here than you have, master,” he said, holding up as testimony to his honour the rusty keys of the church. “ I stopped to see what you meant by prying into places that wasn't meant for you ! ”

The old man laughed a strange wild laugh, and taking

a step or two forward, seized the sexton's arm with a grip of iron.

"Hark ye, friend," he said, "I'm a physiognomist. I have been taking a lesson in physiognomy, and I flatter myself I've learnt something to-night. Tell me now, was that young lady whom I saw on the hearth, playing with the dog, and coquetting with the dog's master, the fair mourner who placed that wreath of violets on yonder tomb?"

"Sure enough that be Miss Alice, bless her."

"Bless her, eh? Suppose that man—her murdered lover—could rise from his grave this night and look upon the picture that has just been shown to me; think you he would bless that girl, fair as she is? Between you and me, friend, I think he would be a fool if he did. Don't you?"

"No, I don't."

"Ah, I see after all you are a philosopher; well, perhaps you are right. The poor devil has received his share of attention; he has been wept over; he has had crape worn for him; he has had flowers placed on his tomb. It is pitiful after all that he should be doomed to lie for ever like a slaughtered beast in far-off seas; but other events as pitiful happen, and still the world goes on. Listen, old friend. You may safely take the advice I gave you a few hours ago. Cast forth those withered violets. The young lady won't ask you to do it; my lesson in physiognomy has told me that. But she won't be angry if you do it for her, since—well, after all, you know they are as rotten as the poor devil who lies in the China sea, and, like him, they're wanted no more."

With a gruff "Good-night" the old gentleman passed

out of the vicarage gate, and walked slowly along the road, then he turned off and followed a narrow path which cut across the fields, and led by an easy route to Plas Ruthven.

The sexton followed ; remembering the brusque, sudden movements of the man, he kept at a safe distance this time ; but he managed not to lose sight of him till he disappeared into the darkness of the Plas Ruthven woods.

Then he stopped. To follow him further would have required the courage of a lion, and this the sexton did not possess. It was bad enough to have to face a madman on the high road, where, being well within call of a hundred persons at least, one's safety must be pretty well assured. But to face a madman alone and unprotected in the dreary woods of Plas Ruthven was another matter. You might scream your loudest no one would hear, or if they did no one would come. They would simply imagine that the restless spirits had grown noisy with their restlessness, and with a superstitious crossing of the breast would quickly avoid the spot. So although, all things considered, the sexton could not be counted a coward, he considered now that discretion was the better part of valour, and wisely paused.

He stood for a time gazing in a strange puzzled way at the spot where the tenant of Plas Ruthven had disappeared.

"He's mad," he said quietly ; "sure enough he's mad. Shall I tell his reverence? No. Shall I tell Miss Alice? No. But I'll keep my eye on *him*."

If, a few hours later, the man had returned to the

vicarage and gazed through another window into another room, he would have beheld a very different picture.

Philip Kingston had taken his departure ; Mr Chepstow and Marion had gone to bed, and Alice was in her room alone. There was no brightness in her face, the smiles had all vanished, her cheek was pale, and her eyes, lately so bright, looked sad and weary.

She knelt beside the bed, wearily putting back the hair which fell in rippling waves upon her shoulders, and folding her white hands, murmured an earnest prayer. As the last words were spoken, a sob escaped her lips.

“Oh, Richard, Richard !” she murmured, “would that God could grant my prayer, and let us meet again. But I will be patient, love, I will be patient.”

The sexton kept his word, and to the best of his powers watched the movements of the tenant of Plas Ruthven.

It was a difficult task, for the old gentleman was as strange and fitful in his movements as his moods. During the day he was very rarely seen, but like the bats and the owls he came forth from his hiding-place when all honest men should be enjoying the comforts of home.

The sexton watched him, and became more than ever convinced that the man was harmless, but still a madman. What man else would do as he did, and there seemed no motive for his actions. His sole wish seemed to be to pry into the doings of other people. During the day the sexton never saw him, for he persistently shut himself up in Plas Ruthven, but at night he came forth to peep through windows, watch strange forms, and generally interest himself in affairs which were no

concern of his. Had the sexton known all he would have been considerably astonished, and by no means certain that the old gentleman's movements were of no particular moment. His principal visits, of which the sexton knew nothing, were paid to the clergyman's house; his principal interest seemed to be centred in the clergyman's family. He used to study them through the uncurtained window, until the curtains were regularly drawn, and through that medium, at least, the movements of the family could be studied no more.

Not being able to watch Alice in the house, he seemed determined to do so when she came forth, and he continually followed her. Alice went and came in quiet unconsciousness, and the wild eyes of the man were ever upon her. Sometimes he saw her with Philip Kingston, sometimes with her father or Marion, and sometimes alone, save for the shaggy dog which gamboled excitedly at her side. Once or twice he paid a visit to the church, and looked again in his strange, wild way at the withered violets which still adorned Richard Glamorgan's tomb. During his last visit he scratched a few words on a piece of paper, and stuck it upon the tomb. When he passed out of the door, the sexton, who happened to be present, came slowly forward, removed the paper from the tomb, carried it to the window, and read these words, "The dead shall rise."

The sexton tore the paper and cast the fragments forth, to be scattered broadcast by the wind.

"Poor creature, poor creature," he murmured, "the Lord have mercy upon him!" and quite convinced now of his harmless lunacy, he watched the man's movements no more.

For several days after Alice's return to the vicarage nothing occurred which was likely in any way to disturb the tranquillity of her home. Indeed, things appeared to be going well. The fever having run its malignant course and secured its victims, seemed to be passing away; and though the clergyman and his eldest daughter had still a good deal to do, they both looked brighter and happier than they had done for many months before. To be sure they were obliged to leave Alice a good deal alone—that was a misfortune which could not be avoided in any way whatever; but Marion, knowing that idleness was the greatest curse her sister could have, generally contrived that she should be well employed. There was so much to do! During the day Alice's fingers were so busily employed that her thoughts could neither review the past nor try to penetrate into the secrets of the future; and during the evening she was never alone. Mr Chepstow and Marion generally contrived to get home early, and Philip Kingston was now a constant visitor at the vicarage. Remembering what had so recently passed between them, Alice at first was rather astonished at the magnanimous behaviour of her former lover. She did not know that Marion, never for one moment neglecting the task which she had set herself to accomplish, had asked the young man to come. She simply looked upon it as a token of future friendship and forgetfulness of the past. In this belief she welcomed him cordially, and was content. But though his visits were frequent and of long duration, the two young people had never lost their self-command, because they had never been alone.

There was always Mr Chepstow or Marion by to give

to the conversation that ease and freedom which it otherwise might not have had.

But one night Philip arrived and found Alice alone. It was long past the usual tea hour; but it was evident from the look of the table that the meal had not been begun, and Alice, having finished all her work, was walking thoughtfully up and down the room, wondering what in the world could have happened to detain her father and Marion. Philip came in; he was such a constant visitor now that he was not even announced.

"It's all right; I know my way to the dining-room, Jane," he said, stepping forward, and with a gentle preliminary tap he opened the door and walked in.

The turning of the door handle brought Alice's walk to a stop. A slight momentary pause, then, with a bright smile and eager outstretched hand, she came forward to meet him.

"How are Mr Chepstow and Marion?" he asked, as he held her hand in his.

"At twelve o'clock to-day they were very well, thank you. I haven't seen them since."

"Aren't they at home, then?"

"No."

A pause—broken by Alice.

"Won't you take off your coat. The room must feel warm to you coming from the night air. I made up a good fire, because I thought papa and Marion would be cold."

No, he would not take off his coat—a thick ulster with a heavy fur collar and cuffs; but he walked over to the hearth and sat down in the easy-chair. He would have given worlds to be able to talk as freely

and unrestrainedly as he did when Mr Chepstow was by ; but simply because they were *tête-à-tête* the words would not come. Alice, standing near the piano carelessly turning over the music, was strangely silent. She was thinking of that little scene which the two had enacted on the shore. It seemed to rise up now as a barrier between them.

“ Will they be home soon, do you think ? ”

“ Of course ; they ought to have been here two hours ago. When you opened the door I thought it was papa.”

Silence again. At Philip’s entrance, Oscar, who was now a constant resident at the vicarage again, had gamboled by his young mistress’s side to give his former master a welcome. As no notice had been taken of him, he leisurely strolled back to his place again. He was now stretched full length upon the hearth, his shaggy head resting between his paws. Philip leaned forward and lifted one of his long silken ears.

“ Oscar, old man, you’re getting quite an epicure.”

“ Yes ; he knows how to make himself comfortable, doesn’t he ? ”

“ He’ll be roasted if he stays here ! ”

“ Oh no, he won’t ; he goes through that half-roasting process every night, and it seems to agree with him.”

Silence again. Philip still kept his seat, his hands still pulled at the dog’s silken ears, but his eyes still rested upon Alice. He was evidently thinking more of Alice than of her dog, for Oscar, after submitting silently to a good deal of rough treatment, and enduring a good deal of pain, gave vent to his outraged feelings

in a prolonged howl. Philip, who had forgotten the dog's very existence, gave a violent start; while Alice, forgetting all her reserve, turned upon her visitor.

"Don't be cruel, Philip; let the dog alone!"

The look, the tone, were precisely those which she would have used in addressing him two years before. Philip saw this and became more at his ease, while Alice suddenly becoming self-conscious, grew more reserved than ever.

"Oscar, old man, I beg your pardon!" he said, laughingly, addressing the dog. Then strolling over towards the piano, he asked, "Any new songs, Alice?"

"No!"

"Isn't that a new one?" pointing to a bran new piece of music which lay in a roll close to her hand.

Alice nodded.

"To me, certainly," she said; "to you, perhaps, but it isn't really new. Indeed, I believe it is quite an old song. It was given to me by my cousin when I was leaving Troufleurs."

"Is it pretty?"

"Judge for yourself."

She sat down before the piano, ran her fingers softly along the keys, and sang the following lines:—

"When the dews are earliest falling,
When the evening glen is grey,
Ere thou lookest, ere thou speakest,
 My beloved,
I depart and I return to thee.
Return, return, return."

When she ceased,—her voice dying to a low plaintive whisper,—Philip was buttoning his coat,

"I am afraid I shall have to go," he said awkwardly.

"I am so sorry papa and Marion are not here. You have had your walk for nothing, you see."

He turned quickly; he was about to take her hand, for his heart prompted him to say,—

"Alice, my darling, I came to see you; with you I could spend every hour of my life."

He stooped towards her; he looked in her face, then he turned away.

"No," he said to himself; "it is useless. If I speak to her again of love, henceforth she will not even allow me to be her friend."

He walked over to the window, impatiently pulled aside the curtain, and looked out.

"Would you like a walk, Alice?" he asked, and added quickly, as he drew the curtains close again, "what an idiot I am! Of course you wouldn't like a walk; it is very dark, and freezing hard!"

"Which makes no difference to me," said Alice quickly. "Yes, Philip, if you'll wait while I get a shawl I'll go. I will walk with you just to the end of the road, and very likely I shall meet papa."

She ran upstairs; in three minutes she reappeared, looking prettier than usual, with a warm cloak and hood wrapped well about her head and shoulders. As Philip looked at her he felt more than ever inclined to put her golden head upon his shoulder, and fold her to his heart. He contented himself, however, with wrapping the shawl more closely about her neck for fear she should take cold. It was freezing bitterly outside, and the ground was so slippery that Alice had to cling closely to her companion. They walked

to the end of the road without meeting a soul. Alice paused.

"I can't imagine what keeps them so late," she said.
"Well, I mustn't go any further. Good-night, Philip."

"I shall walk back as far as the house with you."

"Indeed, you will not. See, I've Oscar to protect me, so I can go quite well alone ; besides—why, here is papa !"

A figure came up ; it proved to be, not Mr Chepstow, but Mr Tremaine, the lawyer. He raised his hat, then cordially shook Alice by the hand.

"How do you do, Miss Chepstow ? Charmed to meet you. A cold night for you to be out, though. Are you going far ?"

"No," said Alice. "When you came up I was just about to turn and go home again."

"So much the more fortunate for me. I am going that way. Shall we walk together ? I beg your pardon," he added suddenly, seeing Philip. "Pray, excuse me, Miss Chepstow, when I offered you my company I thought you were alone."

The tone in which those words were spoken irritated Alice, and she answered curtly enough,—

"If you had come up three minutes later, I *should* have been alone. Good-night, Philip," she added, turning to her guest. "Papa and Marion will be sorry to have missed you, but you must come soon again."

She turned away—took the lawyer's proffered arm and walked with him up towards the vicarage.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"I MUST SEE YOU ALONE."

THE moment the two were well out of earshot, Mr Tremaine turned to his companion and said quickly,—

“Miss Chepstow, I want a private interview with you; my dear young lady, I have something of the greatest importance to communicate to you; let me beg of you to grant my request and see me alone!”

Even now he spoke softly, almost in a whisper. It was late, certainly, and past the hour for chance listeners to be abroad; but he mistrusted the darkness. It might even then be affording fit shelter for many jealous eyes, and sharp ears. But Alice had no such suspicions, and she answered boldly and clearly enough.

“You want to see me alone, Mr Tremaine. Then you should come to the vicarage. I am alone nearly all day. But we are quite private *now!*”

“Hush, my dear Miss Chepstow, not so loud!” whispered the lawyer, glancing fearfully around him. Then turning again confidentially to Alice, he added, “You are astonished at my caution, I see! Well, the fact is, caution is one of the first lessons we lawyers have to learn;—caution and secretiveness. We have always so much to conceal. But let me return to the point in question. I am at this present moment possessed of a secret which due reflection has told me it is my painful duty to reveal to you; but between you and me it must be kept a secret, and therefore it demands a secret meeting?”

Alice listened in amazement. To what did all this tend. She asked the lawyer if he would explain at once.

"Out here in the darkness, on the high road, where a dozen ears might be listening?—impossible!"

"Will you come to the vicarage to-morrow, then? I will stay at home all day."

"Out of the question," returned the lawyer. "I would infinitely prefer a more private meeting; walls have ears, and a secret confided to you in your own house would be everybody's secret to-morrow!"

"Really, from what you say, no place seems to be safe!"

"You are perfectly right, my dear young lady,—no place is perfectly safe; it therefore behoves us to choose the safest we can get, which is the open country."

"The open country?"

"Precisely,—where we can see all around us, and detect the first lurking listener that happens to stroll by. To-morrow, therefore, at twelve o'clock, I shall take a constitutional walk on the sea-shore; if you feel inclined to do the same thing, we can meet and continue our walk together. Will that suit you?"

"Yes," returned Alice, "I will make it suit me. Good-night, sir!"

They stood now close to the vicarage gate. Alice held forth her hand; the lawyer took it and held it in both of his.

"You will not mention to any person whatever what has passed between us to-night?"

"No."

"Nor the meeting which we have arranged for to-morrow?"

"I do not like secrets of this kind ; but if you think it is best, I will not mention it !"

The lawyer shook the girl's hand warmly.

"I knew from my former experience of you that I could rely upon your discretion. Yes, it will be best —for *your sake*!"

"For *my sake*? Sir, what can you mean? What—"

"Hush, you shall hear to-morrow; do not fail to come—at twelve o'clock on the sands, remember!" And before she could say another word, he was gone. Not a moment too soon. As Alice turned to enter the gate, a voice arrested her.

"Alice, is that you?" it said, and the next moment Marion and Mr Chepstow came up.

"Who was that with you at the gate?" continued Marion. "Surely I heard some one making off as we came up."

"Yes, you did. It was Mr Tremaine."

"Mr Tremaine, from London?"

"Yes. Philip has been here; but he couldn't stay. I walked with him to the end of the road, thinking I might meet you. I met Mr Tremaine instead, and he brought me back to the gate."

"Very good of him, I am sure. I ought to be grateful, but I'm not. I can't bear that man."

"Why, Marion?"

"I don't know why, dear. It's a case of Dr Fell, I think. I don't like his eyes. I detest his little shrunken figure and his cold heartless sneer. If all lawyers are like Mr Tremaine, heaven preserve me from them in future!" And Marion dismissed the lawyer from her mind.

For the time being Alice was obliged to do the same

thing. Her father and sister were both cold and tired ; they wanted to be made comfortable ; so her hands were pretty full. She had to make the tea, and preside over it. That done, Marion was obliged to go and see to things in the kitchen ; and Mr Chepstow, whose sight seemed to be failing him, asked his youngest daughter to read to him. An hour's reading—an hour's chat—and supper came in ; then the little household assembled for prayers, and, having received the old clergyman's benediction, retired to rest.

Precisely at twelve o'clock the next day, Mr Tremaine met Alice on the lonely sea-shore.

"I have come," said Alice, when the lawyer stood, holding her hand in his. "I have come, sir, because you seemed so anxious to see me ; but if you have anything very unpleasant to say, I wish you would put it off till another day."

The lawyer pursed his lips and blinked his eyes.

"Well, I certainly cannot pretend to say that what I have to reveal to you is altogether of a pleasant nature ; but unfortunately I fear it must be told at once. But come, my dear, we must walk, or we shall be observed."

He turned and moved slowly along the shore. He shivered as the bitter wind touched him, and glanced at his companion, who faced the frozen air bravely, feeling its touch pleasant to her feverishly burning cheek.

"Miss Chepstow, excuse me if I ask a question which may seem to you impertinent ; but before we proceed any further, I should like to know, merely as a matter of business, if there is any prospect of your marrying ?"

She started—glanced quickly into his face, then turned her head away.

"There is no prospect whatever," she said.

She controlled her feelings admirably ; she might have cloaked them from any one but Mr Tremaine. His keen eyes seemed to read her very heart.

"My dear Miss Chepstow," said the lawyer, creeping up closer to her side, and glancing cautiously around to make sure that they were quite alone, "your lips have not spoken, but your heart has, and it said this, 'I shall not marry because my love lies murdered in the Chinese seas. I have set up in my heart an idol, and though I am young, and have many years of happiness before me, I will not accept them—my heart shall remain desolate until I go to my grave.' Well, my dear, having read those words in your face, I mean to hesitate no longer ; but I will tell you the story, which I brought you here to learn. Listen."

He paused a moment—she gazed at him nervously, and her heart began to beat quickly.

"Some time ago a gentleman went to a London lawyer and asked to make his will. 'He was going,' he said, 'on a long sea voyage ; he had a small sum to leave, and he wished to leave it on particular conditions to the young lady to whom he had been betrothed.' The lawyer, knowing of no obstacle to this arrangement, made the will, but laughed to himself at the conditions, which were excessively hard upon the lady. Said the lawyer,—a smoke-dried old fellow, who had seen little but the dark side of life, carped at humanity in general, and at ladies in particular, and did not believe the conditions I speak of would ever be carried out. Unfortunately the stability of the persons chiefly concerned in that business was soon to be put to the test. During that voyage out the

gentleman was murdered, and the contents of the will had to be made known to the lady's friends."

"Oh, sir, say no more! You are speaking of—"

"Hush, and listen! The lawyer sought them out; he found them by no means rich in worldly goods, but generous enough to refuse what, according to their ideas, did not seem their due. He himself viewed the matter in quite a different light; he believed the lady had a perfect right to the money, so he induced her friends to take it provisionally. Thus business transactions brought him into constant intercourse with the family; in due time he met the lady, and found in her such a sweet specimen of patient endurance and steadfast affection as absolutely to raise his opinion of mankind."

Alice turned towards him and held up her hand as if to silence him, but he persistently went on.

"Hear me out, Miss Chepstow, pray hear me out, for the story must be told. A few weeks ago the lawyer was again seated in his study. He was told that a lady wished to see him. He had grown by this time very tolerant to ladies! He intimated his willingness to see her. So the servant departed, and returned ushering in the person. She too had a story to tell, and after a very few preliminary words, she told it glibly enough. She was an Englishwoman, she said; but had lived abroad for many, many years. She had gone to India, while still in her teens, to marry a young officer to whom she was betrothed, and who, about three months after the marriage, died of sunstroke. Left thus a penniless widow, she entered an English family as governess, and remained in that position until the date of her second marriage, which took place about six or eight years ago. The second hus-

band, also an Englishman, was a man of wealth. But the young couple were so extravagant that, in a very few years they became beggars. What was to be done? Evidently the only course open to them was the one which they determined to follow. She returned to her educational slavery, while he came home to visit his estates and consult with his family solicitor as to what was best to be done. They were separated for two years. At the end of that time he, finding he could do nothing, and wearied out no doubt with the long separation, determined to rejoin his wife. He started for China. Ere the ship in which he sailed could reach its destination it was attacked by Chinese pirates, and the man was slain. 'I have returned to England,' she said, 'to look into my husband's private means. I have come to you, because I believe that you are the only person able and willing to give me the information I require.' I asked her name, and she told me that her name was—*Mrs Richard Glamorgan!*'

He paused, and there was silence. Alice, feeling sick and faint, had taken a seat upon the beach and turned her pale face towards the sea. The wind crept in over the ocean; its touch seemed to revive her. Presently she looked up and encountered the keen eyes of the lawyer. They were fixed in strange earnestness upon her face.

"Mr Tremaine," she asked quietly, "how long have you known this story?"

"Twelve days."

"And you believe it? You think it is *true*?"

"At first, my dear Miss Chepstow, I must frankly confess I did *not* believe it," returned the lawyer blandly.

"I had known Glamorgan from childhood ; I had esteemed him ; I wish to do so still. For his sake, then, as well as for your own, I persisted in believing the woman's story to be false—until I had proved it true !"

"If he was married," said Alice quietly ; "if he loved his wife and was going out to join her, why did he make a will and leave to me everything he possessed in the world ?"

The lawyer started, and turning from the girl gazed intently at the sea.

"These are questions," he said, "which I cannot pretend to solve. The man had a strange nature. I confess it puzzled me. Doubtless he was possessed of some sense of honour : the treatment to which he had subjected you demanded some compensation !"

He was looking at the sea, therefore he did not see the girl's face as he uttered these words. When he turned to her again she was standing upon the beach. He stepped forward as if to continue his story, but the girl bade him be silent.

"You have told me your story," she said. "Now, hear mine. I knew that Mr Glamorgan had been—married !"

Tremaine started.

"You knew it, and yet—"

"But I knew also what you did not know, that the woman who lived with him had a husband, and that consequently she was his wife only in name !"

"Positively—and your informant ?"

"Was Mr Glamorgan himself. He concealed nothing from me ; he was too noble. That woman has deceived you as she deceived him."

Tremaine looked perplexed and nonplussed, but only for a few minutes. Then he turned with a peculiar look to Alice.

"All the same ; he sailed to rejoin her in the East."

"It is false !" cried Alice indignantly. " You libel his memory—he was too good. Have you more to say to me ? If not, let me go home ! "

"But you have not heard everything. Pray, attend to me a little longer—"

But trembling and weeping, Alice turned away.

"You have told me enough for one day," she said. "I will go home now ! "

And the lawyer, looking at her, thought it was better to let her go.

Next day they met again. The first shock of the new fear over, the first pang of agony having spent itself and left her heart cold, Alice, summoning all her resolution to her aid, heard, little by little, the whole sad details of the story. Again and again she met Tremaine, and every time she left him, her tearless eyes turned with a sadder gaze towards the dreary dwelling which she once had taught herself to look upon as her home.

"You see, my dear," said the lawyer one day, "things have been wisely ordained. Even if he had lived, that house could never have become your home." Alice was silent, so the lawyer continued quietly,— "I am more grieved for you than for his widow ; yours is the hardest to bear ; but you are too good and beautiful to break your heart for what was worthless. Forget the past—or think of it as an evil dream ! "

A dream ; yes, it was a dream, and how it all had faded !

Hard as she had found it to believe ill of him she loved, resolutely as she had shut her eyes and ears, the proofs which the lawyer brought were undeniable. Even while his arms were round her he knew that he was false, for with her kisses still upon his lips, he turned his face towards the land which held the woman who was so much more entitled to his love. The thought of it made her shudder—it was so hard for her to bear, harder than his death; then she had hope—she could dream of him, weep for him, and think of the time, which after all might not be very far distant, when the two should meet again. But *now!* She could not look back; she could not look forward; the very thought of him filled her heart with a sad and bitter pain.

“Why did he deceive me?” she said to herself again and again. “If I could have heard the truth from *his* lips—it might not have been quite so hard to bear!”

But the man lay cold and silent in his tomb; there was no voice to plead for him; no lips to whisper, “Alice, Alice, I love you—you alone.”

Now that she was assured of the truth of the story, Alice determined to be just. Her first care was to resign every penny of the money which Glamorgan had left as compensation to the girl whom he had wronged. To this course of action the lawyer at first was utterly opposed. The money, he avowed, had been left to Alice; legally and justly it was hers—and hers it should remain. But Alice was firm.

“It shall go to—to—the woman,” she said; “it is legally hers, and since he cared for her more than he cared for me, it makes her claim the stronger.”

So the money went to the widow, and she, being doubtless well satisfied with the result of her journey, disappeared, and was heard of no more.

Such, at least, was the story told to Alice by the lawyer during their last interview.

"Since this is the case, my dear," the lawyer added, "I think I advised wisely when I said that this affair should be kept a secret between us two?"

"Perhaps you did well!" said Alice wearily.

"Your sister knows nothing of it?"

"Nothing whatever!"

"But about the money; surely she must know that the money has gone from you?"

"Yes, she knows that; she believes it has gone to a person who has as much right to it as I!—who perhaps needs it more."

Then for the first time since she had heard the news, she covered her face with her hands and eased her broken heart in tears.

It was cruel, pitilessly cruel; but the most pitiless hand of all was the one which had shattered her idol, destroyed her dream, and left her without a hope in all the world.

Late that night Alice sat before her bedroom fire, a bundle of letters in her hand. They were bound up with crape, and surrounded by a wreath of violets. She held them tenderly, she kissed them softly, then bending forward, she placed them in the fire. They arose in one crimson flame, then turned black. She looked at the ruined pile without a tear, without a sigh. It seemed to her as if her heart had turned to stone.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DEAD ARISE.

THAT same night Mr Tremaine walked slowly along the road which led towards Plas Ruthven.

He was not a quick walker at any time ; but on that night his progress was particularly slow, for the road was still slippery with the frost, and the evening had grown so dark as to make it impossible for him to see his way clearly. He passed down the road, through the dilapidated lodge gate, up the dreary avenue, never pausing until he stood on the open lawn before the dwelling.

How dreary it was, how dark and eerie and sad. The trees, stript of their foliage, groaned weakly, and the bitter air all round seemed full of the voices of the dead. The lawyer, by no means a superstitious man, shivered that night with superstitious dread, for the wind as it touched his face seemed to come like death's cold fingers, and above the whispering of the wind rose the wild murmurs of the sea.

Tremaine approached the door and knocked. The rusty knocker fell with a creaking hollow sound ; then the echoes died, and he heard the dreary drip, drip of the water which fell from the eaves of the house, and the startled flutter of the birds crouching for refuge in the ivy. He looked at the house, which was darkly visible in the moonlight. There was no light in the windows, which were all black dark ; over some the latticed shutters were closed, half-concealed by the ivy,

and long blades of grass which sprang here and there from the blackened half-decaying walls.

The lawyer shivered.

"An infernal place!" he said; "a fit tomb for the dead as well as the living; so the people think he's mad? Well, they're about right, he's doing the work of a madman; he's living the life of a madman; but with my help he'll one day become sane again."

He lifted the rusty knocker and knocked again. Again that dreary hollow sound which made the lawyer shiver. He drew back, listening intently; he soon found that his knock had been heard, there was a low shuffling sound; steps proceeded along the lobby. The bolts and bars were cautiously withdrawn, and the door, creaking and groaning, moved slowly back upon its hinges.

"Who's there? Who be you that come a-knocking to Plas Ruthven at this time o' night?"

The husky voice had a whining, grumbling tone, and proceeded from the throat of old Owen Glendower, who stood in the opening holding a flickering candle in his hand. The lawyer, grown impatient with the delay, pushed the old man aside and entered the dwelling, closing the door with such violence as to extinguish the candle which old Owen held in his hand.

The two stood in darkness.

"Strike a light, man," said Tremaine. "Why the devil do you keep the house like a tomb?"

Recognising the tones of his visitor's voice, old Owen gave a diabolical chuckle, and shuffled off to get a light, murmuring as he went,—

"Like a tomb! yes, 'tis *his* tomb, measter, *now*; but look, you know, 'twill be *hers* some day soon."

A minute later he returned, leering over the faint flame of the guttering rushlight at Mr Tremaine, who, trembling slightly, stood waiting in a corner of the ghostly hall.

"Measter Tremaine!" said Owen; "well, 'tis a strange time o' night for you to be coming, sir. A strange time o' night."

"Where is your master? In bed?"

The old man started and opened his red eyes with a leer.

"In bed? Not he! He be up and at work; always working and writing now, Mr Tremaine!"

"Humph. I want to see him!"

"So you shall, sir, so you shall. Come this way. Mind the holes in the board now, sir; it be wearin' away like the rest of us. The old house ain't for this world much longer, Measter Tremaine; some day the fine folk o' the village 'll wake and find it gone; well, let it fall; so long as it buries old Owen in the ruins!"

Muttering thus he led the way along the lobby and up the stairs, Mr Tremaine following. He stumbled several times, for at best the light afforded by the candle was but dim; and the wind creeping through the crevices, swept down the stairs along the lobbies, and made the flame of the candle flicker and grow dim.

At length they paused; after a preliminary tap Owen threw open a door, and the lawyer entered an upper chamber.

The room was tolerably well lit, decently furnished and occupied. At a table, which was strewn with papers, sat a man busily writing.

He was so much occupied that at first he scarcely

seemed to notice the entrance of the two men. The lawyer advanced to the table, laid his hand on his shoulder.

Then the man raised his head and disclosed—the face of Richard Glamorgan !

Yes ; Richard Glamorgan, hideously scared and disfigured, but living still, and known to all in his native village, under a daily disguise, as Mr Ravenscourt, the eccentric tenant of Plas Ruthven.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TENANT OF PLAS RUTHVEN'S DIARY.

“IT is the seventeenth day of October 18—. On this night of the year I begin, in order to pass the tedious hours away, to keep an account of my daily thoughts and doings. The wind is howling outside Plas Ruthven, and the rain-clouds are drifting seaward. A fit night to begin, surely, for a record of such stormy moods.

“There was a time, not so long ago, when I should have scoffed at the idea of keeping a diary ; of posing, pen in hand, like a miss in her teens, and chronicling the small talk and sentimental twaddle of my life. But now I must do something, to kill the infernal tedium of the long nights. Besides writing down one’s thoughts is like pouring them into the ear of a friend. I have no friend, not even a listener, for old Owen Glendower,

though faithful as the devil, is not the man for confidences such as mine, and I tire even of his malignity, as one tires of the savagery of a pet hound.

"Blow wind and crack your cheeks! How the old tenement shakes! Never mind. It may tumble about my ears and bury me in its ruins, for all I heed or care.

"And yet I mustn't die yet; no, no. Had I been hacked into mince-meat by those Chinese swords, and cast incontinently to the bottom of the sea, it would have been another matter; and better perhaps if I had died then. But now I must see it through.

"A curious position. To be standing as it were beyond the gates of death, watching the living puppets through the bars. To be dead, yet living: a dead memory, a living hope. Sometimes, as I sit here alone, I feel indeed like a ghost, unsubstantial, disembodied,

‘A shadow
Upon the skirts of human nature dwelling.’

"It is only when I look on *her*, when I watch *her* from afar, smiling in the sunshine, that I live indeed, that my life comes back to me in a blinding, maddening stream.

"For she *can* smile. She begins to look quite happy. Dead man, are you so soon forgotten? She has not even the comfort of standing by your grave, or casting a flower there; and already—

"What would you have, dead man? Would you have her like Niobe, all tears? or like Lot's wife, all stone? What then? she has mourned, she has wailed, she has used black-bordered paper, worn crape, wept

for you, perhaps prayed for you. What more would you have?

"This delicate creature is young; young people have appetites; must eat and drink if they would live. They cannot give up their days and nights to tears, if they would keep their bloom. The dead can never come back. Would you have grief last for ever? Lie still, dead man, and be content. You are resting, covered with cruel wounds, deep in the Chinese seas; and the salt ooze is in your hair, and the pictures have gone out of your eyes. Does she ever dream of you, or picture you there? Sometimes, perhaps, in the stillness of the night; but by daylight she is peaceful, because you are forgotten.

"What a madman I must be to write such words! Well, I rave on paper to ease my jealous heart. I know she *does* mourn me, does miss me. Why else is her poor cheek so pale, her hand so thin, her eyes so red? Because she smiles sometimes, because her heavy heart at times forgets its care, or tries to forget it, why should I fret and fume! I love a woman, yet I crave for a sorrow which would be superhuman.

"Dear Alice, darling of my heart! some day you will forgive me! Yes, when your dead man rises and folds you to his heart, you will smile indeed. And then —then I shall *know* you are worthy of my trust, for I shall have tried you in triple fire, and found you sublimely true. Yes, yes, I have faith in *your* faith, my darling.

"A woman, faithful to death; a woman, who, having once loved, can never love again! Is such a thing possible, or too miraculous for possibility?

"Well, we shall see. And if this miracle should be realised, then shall come the second miracle of the lost coming back to life, and the sea giving up its dead.

"If this diary is to be anything like a record of my thoughts and experiences during the most crucial period of my life, I had better begin at the beginning, with my return to England. God knows, I have time enough and to spare, so I will put it all down.

"If my purpose fails, and I am to remain dead, the record can stop with me in my living grave. If my purpose succeeds, and if some day soon I arise to clasp to my bosom the being whom I love, I shall keep these sheets for her perusal.

"How she will smile, when all is done, at the sepulchral chronicle.

"I shall not soon forget the day of my arrival in England.

"After as smooth a voyage as even a valetudinarian could wish for, after finding even the Bay of Biscay sunny as the tropics and smooth as a mill-pond, we came creeping up through rain and mist to the English shores, and in the dim dawn of a miserable morning found ourselves anchored off Gravesend.

"A cold shiver ran through me as I stood on deck and saw the old country again.

"Was it an omen? As I waited my turn to go ashore, the old line kept ringing in my ear,—

'Happy is the dead that the rain rains on.'

"Despite my months of eager hope and anticipation,

I felt, for the time being, inconceivably wretched and deserted.

"The rain falling, the prospect all gloomy and forbidding, no kind face to welcome me, no hand to clasp my own. I was utterly alone, and almost regretted that I had not arranged for some sort of a meeting. Even old Tremaine's parchment face would have been some comfort.

"Well, I was soon ashore, and hastening fast as the early express could take me to the great city. Arrived at Fenchurch Street, I found London wrapped in the thick folds of a characteristic London fog. The station seemed dark and deserted, few cabs were waiting about, all seemed dismal in the extreme.

"I had only brought a small portmanteau with me, and had left instructions on shipboard for all the rest of my luggage to be forwarded after me under care of the shipping company in the city. So, without any delay, I hailed one of the cabs, and ordered the driver to take me at once to 35 Bloomsbury Square.

"As we crawled through the fog-wrapped streets, I saw the people coming and going like shapes in a dream, thronging, thronging, despite the horrible blackness. I looked out at them gloomily from my hearse,—my cab I should have said. Muffled up in a great travelling cloak, with the flaps of a sealskin cap drawn over my ears, I suppose I looked uncanny enough in all conscience.

"'Men die, and worms eat them,' I muttered to myself, 'and still the world wags on.'

"After a journey which seemed interminable, for the horse had to crawl rather than walk, and the driver

found it difficult to distinguish one street from another, I reached the square, and pulled up at the lawyer's door. By this time it was just nine o'clock in the morning.

"Bidding the cabman await my return, I knocked at the door. A sleepy man-servant opened it, and somewhat to his astonishment I walked in without ceremony.

"'I wish to see Mr Tremaine,' I said.

"The man looked at me suspiciously from head to foot. My face was almost invisible, and in other respects I suppose I looked like a grampus, or some other traditional monster.

"'What name, sir?'

"'Never mind the name. Say a gentleman from abroad wishes to see him on business. Come, look sharp, if you please; I have a cab waiting.'

"The man disappeared for a minute, and then returning, ushered me into old Tremaine's study.

"'Mr Tremaine is just finishing breakfast. He will be with you directly.'

"The room was only dimly lit by a solitary jet of gas, but I knew it well. It was the same room where, a year before, I had made my will—the same, and quite unchanged. But as I waited impatiently, my eyes fell on something which hung above the chimney-piece. I went close, and peered at it curiously. It was a large crayon drawing, framed in black, and surrounded also within by a black border.

"In a moment I recognised my own likeness; but to put the fact beyond conjecture, I looked more closely, and saw underneath the drawing, in a woman's hand, my own name.

“Richard Glamorgan. Murdered by Chinese pirates at Changfou. August 1861.”

“Beneath this was added in the same hand,—

“*The dead shall rise.*”

“While I stood looking at the drawing with a certain feeling of sickly uneasiness, such as I suppose some poor devil of a ghost might feel when examining his own picture ‘in his habit as he lived,’ I heard a cough behind me, and turning, saw Tremaine standing on the threshold, and examining me quietly.

“‘You wished to speak with me, sir? May I inquire—’

“He paused awkwardly, staring with no very amiable expression at the muffled-up form before him. It was clear that he had not the slightest suspicion of my identity.

“‘If it is a matter of business,’ he proceeded, ‘I think you had better call at my office.’

“I fixed my eyes on his face in the obscurity of the chamber.

“‘So you don’t remember me?’

“‘I really can’t say that I do; indeed, it would be extraordinary if I did, seeing I can see so little of you. Have we met before?’

“Without another word I threw open my heavy coat, and undoing the strings of my sealskin cap, uncovered my head and face.

“Tremaine started, but even now showed no signs of recognition.

“‘Now, do you remember?’

“Something in my voice startled him, and he looked at my face in growing wonder. Then he went very pale.

“‘It can’t be !’ he gasped. ‘No, it’s not possible ! Sir, in God’s name—’

“I answered him with a laugh, and walking up to him, put my hand on his shoulder and looked straight into his eyes.

“Under that likeness the words are written, “*The dead shall rise.*” Well, they *have* risen. Now, do you know me ?

“The cold sweat stood on his forehead ; his eyes seemed starting out of his head as he cried,—

“‘You don’t mean to say— You can’t mean that—that—you are—’

“‘Richard Glamorgan,’ I replied.

“‘Alive !’

“‘I believe so ! Look and see.’

“The old man fell into a chair.

“‘Ring—ring the bell,’ he gasped.

“In a moment the servant appeared.

“‘Bring some brandy !’ he exclaimed ; adding, as the servant ran off to obey his order, ‘I’ll speak to you in a moment ; you’ve taken my breath away ; it’s horrible—I mean wonderful. Dear, dear me.’

“And he glared at me till the brandy came, when he poured out a small glass and tossed it off. Then he rose nervously and closed the door.

“‘If you go on like this,’ I said, ‘I shall begin to think I am a ghost indeed. What’s the matter ? Come, let us shake hands.’

“He took my outstretched hand in both of his, and pressed it cordially.

“‘Forgive me,’ he said, ‘you took me so by surprise.

And you live ! you escaped ! What a miracle. Richard Glamorgan alive ! Well, well.'

"I might as well be dead !" I exclaimed in some irritation, 'for all my friends seem to remember of me. How was it you did not recognise me ?'

Tremaine looked up keenly into my face as he replied,—

"You, you are so altered, so different. No one would recognise you !"

"Fool, I had forgotten these infernal scars, and yet my glass had told me over and over again that my face was covered with them, and that I was more like one of the mutilated wretches that Victor Hugo writes about, than a fair favoured man.

"I looked at the old man with a scowl, which did not, I am afraid, improve my beauty.

"You find me disfigured ?"

"Terribly—I should never have known you. But tell me all about it. Quick, I am all anxiety to learn how you escaped."

"I told him as rapidly as possible how it had occurred ; how, during the massacre, I had leapt overboard, and had managed, despite my wounds, to reach the shore ; how, for many a long day, I had lain delirious in a wretched Chinese fishing village ; where I found, however, some kindly nurses ; how at last I had arisen out of the very shadow of the grave.

"But why, in Heaven's name, did you not write ?"

"At first I intended to do so ; then, as I was likely to be in England as soon as the letter, I changed my mind. I saw that the account of the massacre had got into the papers, and I knew that you would give me up as lost."

“‘ And so we did — so we did. But what possible reason had you for not relieving our suspense ? ’

“‘ None. It was a mere whim.’

“‘ A mere whim ! ’ ejaculated Tremaine. ‘ How ghastly ! ’

“‘ I wanted to come back quietly, as I have done, and take you all by surprise.’

“‘ You have done so indeed,—but—’

“‘ Well, I had a reason after all. Would you like to hear it ? ’

“‘ Very much.’

“‘ *I wanted to learn how Alice Chepstow would take my death.*’

“ A long and ominous silence followed my last words. The lawyer no longer looked in my face, but kept his eyes averted. At last, with a heavy sigh, he said, as if to change the subject,—

“‘ Have you breakfasted ? ’

“‘ I had something on board ship. But tell me about Alice. Is she well ? ’

“‘ Quite well, I believe,’ replied Tremaine dryly.

“‘ How did she bear the terrible shock of the news ? It was enough to kill her.’

“‘ Make yourself easy on that score,’ returned Tremaine ; ‘ she survived the blow.’

“ There was an expression in the old man’s face, and a tone in his voice which I did not like, but I knew his characteristic cynicism, as well as his habitual distrust of Alice, and indeed of all women.

“‘ You made my will known to her ? ’

“‘ Yes.’

“ ‘ And she accepted the trust ? ’

“ ‘ She accepted the trust.’

“ ‘ She has kept it faithfully ? ’

“ ‘ She has kept it so far.’

“ I looked at him keenly ; he returned the look with significance. I shrugged my shoulders and laughed, for already a load was taken off my mind.

“ ‘ That is all I wanted to know,’ I said. ‘ Have you a time table in the house ? ’

“ ‘ A time table ? ’ he repeated. ‘ What for ? ’

“ ‘ I want to find out when the first train goes to Tregelly.’

“ Tremaine started, and evinced a new kind of agitation.

“ ‘ My dear fellow,’ he said nervously, ‘ I will not hear of it. You will stay here to-day—dine here, sleep here. We will talk matters over ; and afterwards perhaps—’

“ ‘ It is impossible ! ’ I cried. ‘ I cannot rest ; I cannot sleep until I see my affianced bride. I will go to her—I shall hold her to my heart again, and that one moment of bliss will make amends for all that I have suffered ! ’

“ ‘ Calm yourself.’

“ ‘ I am quite calm, I assure you. Ah ! Tremaine, you are not a lover, or you would understand my eagerness to look again upon the woman I adore.’

“ The lawyer seemed perplexed. Again and again he shook his head dubiously. Finally he said,—

“ ‘ But you have not satisfied yourself on the one great point. How the young lady has borne her loss.’

“ ‘ I have tortured her enough,’ I cried. ‘ Again and

again when sailing home, I have cursed myself for my mad suspicion, which prevented me from easing her mind at once. The curse of my life has been this mad jealousy. I will end it now, and be a sane man for ever.'

"'Very good,' returned the lawyer, as if resigning himself under protest to the inevitable. 'But you must be careful not to shock the young lady too suddenly. Your unexpected appearance—your personal disfigurement—'

"I started with another angry recollection of the unfortunate change in my personal appearance; and all at once, before I could reason or think, another wild and unreasoning suspicion sent the dark blood burning to my face.

"'What do you mean? You don't dream—you can't suppose for a moment—that she will love me less because—good God! Tremaine, you are indeed a Job's comforter. You believe in nothing!'

"'Forgive me if I have hurt your feelings,' said Tremaine gently.

"'Never mind my feelings; say your say. Nay, it's no use hesitating now. Have you any earthly reason for supposing that Alice Chepstow has ceased to care for me?'

"'Certainly not,' replied Tremaine; 'except that—'

"'Well, except what?'

"'She believes you *dead*.'

"'Just so. Do you think she will be sorry to see me returned to life?'

"'What a question! And yet—'

"He hesitated a moment; looked at me fixedly from beneath his bushy eyebrows; then he proceeded,—

“ ‘ You will remember what I said to you when you were making your will in this very room. Well, I say the same still. In the event of your death the young lady would be very likely to console herself with some one else.’

• • • • •
“ I cannot record our conversation further. I try to put the words down calmly, but my passion conquers me and I choke, as I choked then with rage and shame. Enough to write that Tremaine having invoked to his aid the old demon jealousy, which has been the bane and torment of my life, resumed his mastery over me, and succeeded in convincing me that I might have cause for new distrust ; that, at any rate, it would be wise to wait for a little before letting Alice know of my existence. This is the very course of action I had resolved on before, till the fresh air of the sea, and the quick sense of new life, blew my vapours away.

“ In the course of our conversation, which continued for some time longer, Tremaine informed me that Alice, after recovering from the first shock occasioned by the news of my death, had gone to France, and after remaining there for some little time, had only just returned to Tregelly. He could not, or would not, tell me anything of her doings, but he succeeded by his manner in arousing my anxiety anew.

“ ‘ By the way, Glamorgan,’ he said presently, after I had yielded to his solicitations, and consented to remain that night at his house, ‘ do you know who did that picture ? ’ And he pointed to the crayon over the chimney-piece.

“‘No,’ I said ; ‘I was going to ask you that very question.’

“‘First, don’t you think it a wonderful likeness to have been done from memory?’

“‘From memory?’

“‘Entirely ; and after you were reported to be dead. Well, it is Dorcas’ work ! The poor child was sadly distressed when the horrible news came ; it made her positively ill, for you were always a favourite of hers, as I daresay you know.’

“I walked over to the picture and regarded it with a new interest. It was certainly a clever piece of work, and I said so heartily.

“‘What a surprise this will be for Dorcas ! I must break it to her gently ; the poor child is so tender-hearted. Shall I go and speak to her at once ?’

“I was in no mood to face any other person, however sympathetic, so I begged him to postpone the interview till later in the day. In the meantime I would go and look after my luggage, and make one or two purchases in the city.

“With this excuse I left him, promising to return to dinner in the afternoon.

“The fog still hung over the city as I drove away from Bloomsbury Square. Dismissing the cab at Charing Cross Station, and leaving my portmanteau at the left luggage office, I muffled myself up still closer, and walked out into the streets. All that day I wandered about more like a restless spirit than a man.

“In the afternoon I returned to the lawyer’s, and found Dorcas Tremaine prepared to receive me. She looked, if anything, more prim and pensive than ever :

but as we shook hands, her eyes were full of kindly tears. I was touched by such deep sympathy from one who had always seemed to me rather cold and reserved.

“‘At least *you* have not forgotten me, Miss Tremaine,’ I said. ‘You, at least, do not find me so much changed.’

“We were entering the dining-room arm in arm. She turned and looked eagerly in my face.

“‘I have a good memory,’ she replied, in a low voice. ‘You would always be the same to me !’”

C H A P T E R X X I X.

D O R C A S G I V E S H E R A D V I C E .

“I SPENT two days with the Tremaines. The more talk I had with them, the more I hesitated how to act. During that period, deeply as I was absorbed in my own affairs, I could not fail to observe the secret of Dorcas Tremaine’s strong liking for me ; nay, it was no secret now, for the faithful girl scarcely attempted concealment. I am afraid that, in the gloom and perplexity of those days, I did not discourage her affection, for it came in the form of what seemed genuine sympathy for my position, and she listened to me for hours together, even while I spoke of my love for Alice Chepstow.

“Her own advice was that I should reveal myself to Alice without delay.

“‘It is cruel to prolong her suffering. Go to her at once !’

“‘And so I would, God knows,’ I cried, ‘if I were only certain.’

“‘Don’t listen to papa,’ cried Dorcas, glancing with a curious smile at her father; ‘he is an old raven, and has faith in no one. He believes all women fickle, even false.’

“‘Not *all* women, my dear,’ interrupted Tremaine; ‘say the majority.’

“‘Well, in any case it is a libel,’ returned Dorcas simply. ‘Women are more steadfast than men. A true woman, when she loves once, loves always; be sure of that!’

“‘But a woman can’t love a dead man,’ said Tremaine; ‘and Glamorgan here is dead, to all intents and purposes.’

“‘A woman can love on in despite of death. If she has once loved, she can never forget.’

“I looked at Dorcas. She was doing some simple embroidery work, and as she spoke and worked, she scarcely raised her eyes; but just then her pale cheeks were lit with a faint colour, and I could see that her thin hand trembled.

“‘If all women were like you, Miss Tremaine,’ I said, ‘jealousy would be impossible! ’

“‘Why so?’

“‘Because confidence would be so absolute.’

“She raised her still grey eyes and looked steadily at me.

“‘There is no love without such confidence,’ she replied. ‘We may dignify the feeling with the name of love, but it is only feeble vacillating passion. Love and faith go hand in hand always; indeed, they are twin sisters. Depend upon it both are wanting when one is absent.’

“ What sort of a lesson was she trying to read me ? Certainly, if her proposition was right, I did *not* love Alice Chepstow ; for never, from the very commencement of our intercourse, had my confidence in her been complete. I looked at Dorcas again. There she sat, calm, gentle, forbearing, high-minded ; and I felt that, with such a woman as my wife, I could rely implicitly on her devotion. But then came the difficulty. It was precisely because I did *not* love her, that my faith in her goodness, her fidelity, was so absolute. No, I could not assent to her reasoning. In my nature, at any rate, love and jealousy were the twin sisters, not love and faith.

“ At the end of two days Tremaine made a proposition. If I liked, he would run down to Tregelly, under the pretence of transacting some business at Plas Ruthven, and see exactly how the land lay ; whether Alice was at home ; how she bore her position ; what changes had taken place since my disappearance.

“ To this arrangement I at once assented, and Tremaine left by an early train the very next morning.

“ In the evening he returned.

“ ‘ Well, is she there ? ’ I asked.

“ He nodded his head.

“ ‘ And well ? ’

“ ‘ Quite well.’

“ ‘ Did you see her ? ’

“ ‘ For a moment only.’

“ ‘ Poor Alice. You saw her,—you spoke to her,—did she speak of *me* ? ’

“ ‘ Not a syllable.’

“ ‘ She is certain of my death ? ’

“ ‘ She has not a doubt of it,’ answered Tremaine ;

then after a moment's hesitation, he eagerly took my hand and pressed it warmly, saying, 'Glamorgan, I am very sorry for you. You will need all your courage.'

"What do you mean?"

"You must come to life at once, if you don't want to lose your *fiancée* for ever."

"Lose her! How?"

"It is as I suggested; there is a rival in the field."

"I fell back as if a pistol-shot had struck me to the heart. He added, with a compassionate shake of the head, just glancing at me as he spoke,—

"A lover of long standing, I am told. A Mr Philip Kingston."

C H A P T E R X X X.

W E L C O M E H O M E!

"I HAVE said that I am, by natural constitution, a jealous man. I can well remember that, even as a child, I had wild fits of unreasoning passion when I supposed myself slighted or overlooked by my parents, especially my mother, to whom I was deeply attached. If I had a friend at school, I hated to share his confidence with others, and had many ruptures on that very score.

"What was unfortunate in my temperament, became intensified and deepened by my miserable connection with Helena. Having found reason to distrust one woman, I ended by distrusting the whole sex, and

afterwards when I learned to love Alice Chepstow, I tormented both her and myself by my jealous moods.

"Well, I know my infirmity, yet I remain at its mercy. I have tried again and again to rise superior to it, but the struggle is useless. Trifles light as air, which another man would pass by contemptuously, are strong to me as proofs of Holy Writ. I know I am a fool, but I know equally well that my folly is incurable.

"I remember reading somewhere, long ago, the account of a husband who, distrusting the depth of his wife's attachment, pretended to be dead, and then, coming back in secret and disguised, lived next door to the woman for five long years, watching her daily and hourly with eyes of feverish suspicion. What the final consequence was I have forgotten; I fancy the woman died of a broken heart, and then, too late, the wretched man found that grief had killed her.

"I had always been fascinated by that story; always thought that if I loved a woman, I should like to test her soul in some such way.

"And now, by a strange turn of the wheel of Fortune, the case of that very man is mine!

"I had hesitated at first, but Tremaine's warning decided me. I determined to play the spy upon Alice, and as I found her false or true, to guide my future conduct. When I first unfolded my plan to Tremaine he opposed it, or pretended to oppose it, with all his might. Finally, however, he yielded, and promised to do what he could to help me. Greatly to my surprise, moreover, Dorcas Tremaine approved of my course of action, and saw in it no cause for moral protest or objection.

"The rest was very easy. No word of my rescue had got into the journals ; I had travelled back to England without making any confidences ; and even if my name should appear publicly in any way among the list of passengers, it was sufficiently common, especially in Wales, to excite little or no remark. In all England, only two people knew my story and recognised my identity—Tremaine and his daughter Dorcas,—and they were pledged to keep my secret.

"I may remark, in parenthesis, that I do not even yet quite trust the Tremaines. Tremaine himself is a worthy fellow, and Dorcas a girl of model disposition, yet I have an uneasy feeling in my mind that their sympathy is not disinterested, and that they *wish* Alice to disappoint my ardent hopes. I am well aware that Dorcas is deeply attached to me, and I have not forgotten her father's proposition to me before I sailed for China. Still they both, and Dorcas especially, have strongly dissuaded me against trying Alice's moral strength too far, and only at my earnest entreaty did they consent to assist my views.

"'Only remember,' said Dorcas to me before I left London, 'you have no right to *torture* the woman you love ; and if she fails you, you are yourself to blame !'

"One afternoon, as Tremaine sat in his dingy office, a clerk entered.

"'A gentleman wants to see you on private business.'

"Scarcely were the words out of the clerk's lips when the gentleman alluded to, who had followed close behind, entered.

"How shall I describe him ? He was a tall thin

man, seemingly of about sixty years of age, wearing an old-fashioned cloak and low-crowned broad-brimmed hat. He stooped greatly and leant upon a thick cane. His hair was long and quite grey, and he wore also a grey beard and moustache. His expression was not engaging. One peculiarity of his face struck the spectator at once. Besides being swarthy and deeply wrinkled, it was marked with several hideous scars.

"Good afternoon, Mr Tremaine," he said in a gruff, harsh voice. "Can we have a few minutes' private conversation?"

"Certainly," said the lawyer.

"The clerk withdrew; the stranger took a seat.

"May I ask your name, sir?" said the lawyer.

"My name—let me see!—my name is Ravenscourt; yes, Ravenscourt will do as well as any other."

Tremaine stared and put up his glasses.

"Sir—" he began.

"Let us get to business. I have arranged to start this very night for Plas Ruthven."

In a moment his visitor's identity flashed upon the little lawyer, but still uncertain, he gasped and stammered.

"Is it possible? You are—"

"Not Richard Glamorgan, but Mr Ravenscourt, at your service. Richard Glamorgan is dead; coffined, done with, past recall. I am the new tenant of Plas Ruthven."

"Of course he recognised me then, and while I sat laughing at his discomfiture, stared at me still in positive dismay.

"I think my disguise is tolerably effective," I said; "still it did not deceive Miss Tremaine."

"What! Did Dorcas—"

“ ‘ I called at Bloomsbury Square before I came here and saw her. She was completely mystified until we began to converse, but at the first sound of my voice I found that I was discovered.’

“ ‘ It seems an absurd affair,’ grumbled Tremaine, as he looked at me scowlingly from head to foot. ‘ More like play-acting than honest business. So you are going down in that get-up, eh ? ’

“ ‘ Precisely. Have you carried out my instructions ? ’

“ ‘ About Plas Ruthven ? Yes.’

“ ‘ You have told old Glendower, the caretaker, to expect a tenant, an eccentric gentleman of the name of Ravenscourt ? ’ Tremaine nodded. ‘ And you have, by one means or another, informed the Chepstows that the old place is let ? ’

“ All had been arranged as I desired. At my suggestion Tremaine handed me a receipt for six months’ rent, made out in the name of Ravenscourt, and also a letter empowering the said Mr. Ravenscourt to take immediate possession. After a little more desultory conversation I rose to go.

“ ‘ Excuse me if I am frank,’ said Tremaine, as we shook hands. ‘ I think you are acting foolishly ! ’

“ ‘ How so ? ’

“ ‘ You are putting your head into the lion’s jaws. In the first place, you will be discovered.’

“ ‘ Trust me for that ! ’

“ ‘ In the second place, your courage will fail you. Ah, you may shake your head, but I think I know your weakness the moment you see the young lady’s pretty face—it is pretty, I honestly admit. You will tear off your disguise and rush into her arms ! ’

“‘I am not quite so weak as you fancy,’ was my reply. ‘I shall watch her like a hawk. I shall read her very soul, and then—’

“‘And then, as wise as ever, yield to her fascinations. Better to have remained with us incognito, and seen what time brought forth. But you are resolved ! Well, goodbye.’

“As I left him, he looked far from amiable, but I knew well that I could rely upon his discretion. That night I took the Welsh express and travelled down to Tregelly.

“Day had not broken when I reached the lonely railway station, which was almost deserted. Not without difficulty I procured a conveyance from an inn in the neighbourhood, and was driven with my scanty stock of personal luggage to Plas Ruthven.

“It was still dark as I drove up the desolate avenue, but as I halted close to the old house, the red light of the winter dawn was just becoming visible. It was bitterly cold ; the trees were black and bare, and through their branches a keen wind was howling.

“Stepping out of the carriage, I approached the front of the house and rang. The bell jangled loudly within, and the whole tenement seemed to shake like a *caput moruum* with chattering teeth. I listened, but there was no response within.

“Again and again I rang, but no one came.

“Drawing back a few paces I looked up at the building. All the windows were carefully closed and shuttered, and over the shutters the rust and mildew lay. Plas Ruthven was never a lively place to look on, but now it seemed as forbidding as a tomb.

“While I stood up—gazing, I saw one of the latticed shutters move, and the next moment a gnome-like head appeared, gazing down.

“‘Who be there?’ growled a sleepy voice.

“‘Come down at once,’ I cried, with an angry gesture, ‘and open the door.’

“Something was growled in answer, then the shutter was noiselessly closed, and the face disappeared.

“‘Put down my traps on the doorstep,’ I said to the driver, ‘and you may go.’

“The man did as I requested, and when I had paid him, mounted his box, and drove off, not at all sorry, I could see, to leave the gloomy place. But I could see him looking back with a very dubious expression, as he disappeared along the avenue.

“Presently I heard a shuffling of feet, a drawing of bolts and dropping of chains; and at last, half-dressed, nightcap on head, Owen Glendower made his appearance.

“‘Be it Measter Ravenscourt?’ he demanded, puckering up his face and scowling savagely at me. ‘Look ye now, ‘tis a fine hour to knock honest folk out o’ their beds.’

“‘Hold your tongue, man, and carry in my luggage,’ I answered, stalking into the hall.

“Grumbling and grunting to himself, the old man obeyed my bidding, while, thrusting open the door, I entered the dining-saloon.

“It was quite dark, but for a feeble light which crept in through the shutters. The tables and chairs were inches deep in dust, the pictures on the walls dust-covered too, the ceiling and walls black with dust and covered with cobwebs.

"'Is there any more on ye, measter, or ha' ye comed alone ?'

"I turned and saw old Owen gazing grimly up into my face.

"I am alone. Have you carried in my luggage ?'

"Ay, there it be,' said Owen, jerking his head towards the hall.

"Is there a fire anywhere ?'

"Fire ? No, there be no fire. Look ye now, measter—'

"I cut short his sentence by pushing past him, and walking quickly upstairs to the very room where I write these lines. Though the old staircase was in darkness, I knew my way well. Reaching the landing above, I came upon the door I sought.

"Here, measter ! measter !" croaked Owen, creeping wheezily up the stairs behind me, 'where be you agoin' ?'

"By this time I had turned the handle of the door and found it locked ; reaching down I found a key, which I turned and opened the door.

"The first breath from the room was like the breath from a tomb ; cold mildewy, yet stifling and unwholesome. But I pushed my way in, and approaching the window opened it (not without difficulty, for the sash was stiff with dirt and rust), and threw open the shutters. The red light of dawn came in, and I saw the room as I left it a year before.

"This, in times past, had been my study. The few books I had possessed were still upon the shelves, the table was still strewn with papers in my handwriting, over the chimney-piece hung a rusty fowling-piece, and on the chimney-piece itself a perfect hecatomb of old

pipes, from the aristocratic meerschaum to the common clay. Everything was deep in dust. Wherever one's finger was placed it left a trail. The whole room smelt like a charnel house.

"Light a fire in this room," I said to the old man, who stood gasping with astonishment on the threshold.

"Measter! look you now, this be Measter Richard's room," he cried, as if I were profaning the place.

"Do as I bid you," I said sternly. "Stop though, one moment; what's your name?"

"My name? Owen Glendower," he answered surlily.

"Then listen to me, Owen Glendower," I said, pointing my forefinger at him. "Understand, once for all, that I am the master of this house. If you fail to do as I bid you, without a murmur or grumble, I shall turn you out of the door; or, perhaps, if you are particularly disagreeable, throw you out of the window. Obey my orders—be civil, and I may suffer you to remain, and pay you well for your services. Do you understand?"

"He made no reply, but still seemed greatly puzzled. Finally, though not without a silent protest, he retired, and returned forthwith with some firewood and a basket of dry peat.

"It was a long time before the fire would light, but at last, by dint of hard blowing, Owen succeeded in making it burn. Even while he was busily engaged upon his knees, I saw his eye furtively regarding me, and heard him muttering perplexedly to himself.

"Look you now, measter," he said at last, "if so be you be going to stay in Plas Ruthven, you'll want women-folk to cook yer vittle and make yer bed. Be your servants a-comin'?"

“‘I have no servants,’ I replied.

“‘What! None! Comed all alone? Then you beant agoin’ to stay, measter?’

“‘I am going to stay,’ I answered, ‘as long as it suits my pleasure. I shall want no attendance, beyond what you can give.’

“He rose, tottering to his feet, and stared at me again; then taking note of my reverend hair and wrinkled face, he shook his head slowly.

“‘It’s none o’ my business,’ he muttered; ‘but maybe you don’t know Plas Ruthven. It’s an ugly place, measter. They do say as ’tis spirit haunted, and since Measter Richard died, queer things have been heard and seen.’

“‘Ghosts, eh?’

“‘Ay, ghosts, Measter Richard’s ghost,’ he added, looking at me keenly to see the effect of his words.

“‘The ghost of Mr Richard Glamorgan! Of all ghosts, that is the one I should most like to see!’

“‘You would!—hark to that now! Ah, but you don’t mean it, measter!’

“I saw that the old fellow, for some purpose of his own, was trying to play upon my fears. I looked at him; our eyes met again, and I detected in his face an expression of sly malignity. Without another word I walked over to him, seized him, and held him by the throat.

“‘Help! Murder!’ he screamed, but with a grip of iron I choked the sounds.

“‘Once and for all,’ I said, speaking in my natural voice, “let us understand each other. Nay, hold your tongue, or I will strangle you. Look me in the face

steadily, no flinching. Who am I ? What is my name ? Come, I'll help you !'

" So saying, I drew off my white wig and false beard. With a wild cry, more like a shriek of terror than a cry of recognition, he fell upon his knees.

" ' Measter Richard ! Alive ! '

" ' No, Mr Richard's ghost,' I said, bending over him ; ' remember that, Owen Glendower ; not myself, but the shadow of myself. If you whisper to any living soul that I am living I will wring your neck ! '

" With low cries, he was mumbling and kissing my hands. When he raised his face, his old eyes were quite dim ; but his cheeks were twisted with a strange smile.

" ' I knowed you ! I knowed you ! ' he exclaimed. ' When I see you a-striding up the stairs, and a-flinging open the windy, and when I heerd your own voice, I knowed you was no old man and no stranger. O Lord ! O Lord ! and you have come back alive ! '

" I was touched by the old scoundrel's unaffected delight at seeing me. The first shock of recognition over, he stood grinning and chuckling and rubbing his hands together.

" Not a bit changed neither. When I feel his fingers round my throat, thinks I, 'tis either Measter Richard or old Nick, surely. Many's the time you used to give old Owen a shake like that.'

" I may note here, by the way, what I believe to have been the secret of my power over this old misanthrope. I had never either petted or humoured him ; on the contrary, I had, when the fit seized me, treated him like a dog. While everybody else feared him, I had been his master, a liberal one enough sometimes ;

but always determined, and I knew now that, to retain my hold upon him, I must shape my conduct on the old lines. I did so, and he yielded at once to the former mastery.

"I threw myself into a chair on one side of the fire-place, and pointed him to another.

"'Sit down, and answer my questions.'

"Still grinning and chuckling and rubbing his hands together he obeyed, looking more like a wretched gnome than ever, as he sat half doubled up in his chair, peering at me with his rheumy eyes.

"'First, what is my name ?'

"'Name ? why, look ye now, Measter Richard—'

"'Take care,' I cried, holding up my finger warningly. 'How often am I to repeat that Mr Richard Glamorgan is dead ? My name is Ravenscourt, and you see me to-day for the first time !'

"He chuckled again and nodded.

"'Very good,' I said ; 'repeat my name !'

"'Measter Ravenscourt.'

"'Take care you do not forget it. Now tell me all that has passed since Mr Richard died.'

"Thus my catechising began. As it proceeded, Owen evinced more and more cunning delight. For hours we sat together till I knew all that he could tell me ; heard all that he had heard or seen."

C H A P T E R X X X I.

R E S U R G A M !

“THE whole scheme of my mysterious return was one after Owen Glendower’s heart. He appreciated it at once, with a relish worthy of a more intellectual creature. He, like Tremaine, was a misogynist, and had no belief whatever in women, and I found that I had to discount many of his statements before getting at the truth concerning Alice Chepstow. Little by little, however, I extracted from him the little positive knowledge that he possessed, discarding as I did so the cunning leaven of malignity and suspicion with which it was surrounded.

“First, I discovered for certain that Alice had suffered greatly on receiving the news of my violent death. She had, in fact, been dangerously ill for some time. Then on recovering she had gone away for several months for change of air and scene. A few weeks before my arrival at Plas Ruthven she had returned, greatly improved both in health and spirits. The day after her return she had come alone to Plas Ruthven, and old Owen peeping out had seen her standing upon the lawn, dressed in deep black, and weeping bitterly.

“So far the old man’s tale brought hope and comfort. A little further questioning, however, elicited further information of a less pleasant character. Alice had no sooner returned than she was visited frequently, indeed almost daily, by Mr Philip Kingston. It was reported, moreover, in the village, that Kingston had been in her

company abroad, and had there made her an offer of marriage.

"So, after all, Tremaine had told me only the bare truth. There *was* a lover in the case, and that lover was Philip Kingston. It remained now for me to discover with my own eyes and ears whether the man's suit really met with any encouragement from Alice herself.

"Had I trusted the croaking of old Glendower, I should at once have been convinced that Alice was already false to me—at least in thought. There could be no mistaking the significance of his looks and words as he described what he had heard and seen, and I could have strangled him there and then in the new fury of my jealousy and hate. But knowing his character, I was not yet satisfied. I determined to see with my own eyes, hear with my own ears, to judge her fairly before I suffered myself to condemn.

"Since that dreary night when, like a spirit from the grave, I emerged from the shadows of night and entered Plas Ruthven, twelve days have passed, and yet, though I have chafed and fretted like an imprisoned bird, I have never crossed the threshold. Whenever I go to the door, some strange invisible hand takes hold of me and drags me back, and I, weak fool that I am, I yield, because, forsooth, I am afraid.

"Afraid? Yes, actually afraid;—though I have in my lifetime faced the wrath of God and man. I shrink from the blow that can be dealt me from a woman's eyes.

"I am a mass of contradiction,—hard as iron, yet weak as any babe.

“For the last twelve months the hope within my breast has kept me alive. Yes, when I lay in China with grim death hovering within an inch of my pillow, it was the hope of seeing her once again that raised me as it were from the dead. And now I am within a mile of her, I gaze upon the very roof that shelters her, breathe the same air with her, and yet I shrink from the first sight of her face.

“Alice, my darling, it is because I love you—because I dread to find you false—that I fear to take a first long look into your eyes.

“The die is cast—another step is taken on the road which is to lead me to all the delights of heaven, or all the tortures of hell.

“To-night, issuing like a guilty thing from my abode, I took my first walk through the village. It was an ordeal, but I have passed through successfully, so successfully that I have gained courage, and feel more prepared for that greater ordeal which is yet to come. I have not seen Alice! Well, perhaps, so far God has been merciful. I can yet live on, hoping that she is true.

“When I resolved to show myself in the village, I determined to wait until the sun had gone down; for being so well known, I feared that if I faced the broad daylight, despite my disfigurement and disguise, some sharp eye would recognise me, and so bring to a sudden and ignominious termination all my well-laid plot. No, I could not, dared not, brave the daylight. I issued forth at dark.

“It was not so late but that many people were abroad, and ere I had left the Plas Ruthven woods

a quarter of a mile behind me, I had braved the keen glance of many eyes.

"At first feeling within me a certain sense of shrinking fear, I walked with bowed head and eyes cast down ; but by-and-by gaining courage, I raised my head, and at first somewhat timidly, but afterwards more boldly, returned the glances of my neighbours. I saw at once that my fears were vain. In the eyes that met mine I detected no recognition, only idle curiosity.

"How could *they* tell that the dead had risen—how could *they* know that in the body of a man whose head was frosted with the snow of many winters, whose shoulders were bowed down beneath the heavy hand of time, was the soul of Richard Glamorgan, troubled and storm-tossed—seeking for that one thing in all the world which could bring him peace.

"I passed through the village and up the hill, never pausing to draw breath until I stood in the churchyard amid the green graves of the dead ; then, still leaning heavily on my staff, and keeping my cloak wrapped well about my form, I paused, looked at the clustering hamlets below me, the flat stretches of marshes beyond, and beyond again, the glorious sweep of the open sea.

"Heavens, how my pulses throbbed ! how the life-blood within my veins seemed to turn to fire ! Wherever I looked I seemed to see her face smiling up into mine, and to hear her sweet voice murmuring, 'I love you !'

"But such thoughts were not to be nurtured. I quickly dismissed them from my mind ; and, in order to turn my thoughts into other channels, I entered the church. Here, again, pleasant memories assailed me. The first thing that met my eye was the pew

wherein I had so often sat beside her, and as I looked upon it, it seemed that the calm air about me was sweet with the perfume of her breath. Feeling like an intoxicated man, yet subdued a little, perhaps, by the sweet, calm silence of the place, I passed on. Day was fading fast, night rapidly advancing; yet the pale grey light which fell in fitful gleams through the diamond panes of the church windows at length showed me what I sought.

“It played in tremulous rays upon a tomb.

“A white scroll falling from the hands of two white-robed angels, ornamented with a black border, and engraved with my own name:—

RESURGAM!

Sacred to the Memory of

RICHARD GLAMORGAN,

Who was Murdered in the Chinese Seas on the
31st day of August 186—.

“MAY HE REST IN PEACE.”

“As I gazed, a tremor as if from the touch of death’s cold fingers passed over my frame, and I seemed for the moment to feel the salt ooze in my hair, and the foul things of the sea crawling about my bones. Ay, it seemed as if I lay out there in the Chinese seas, far from home and kindred, forgotten, unaneled, far from her whom I prized more than all the riches of the world.

"I walked forward to look at the tomb ; I bent down, and stretched forth my now trembling hand. The light which revealed the tomb, revealed now a wreath which lay thereon.

"A wreath of immortelles, spotless and pure as the soul of her whom I knew, must have placed them there —enduring as her love.

"I lifted the flowers reverently, tenderly ; I pressed them to my burning lips ; then I felt that my better soul was rising within me—my eyes were full of tears.

"I replaced the wreath upon the tomb, left the church, and stood again amidst the graves, gazing down upon the village.

"How peaceful it looked lying there in the evening light of that chill November sky ! There was the vicarage, the little green gate where we had so often met and parted, the house half buried still in clustering ivy leaves ! In imagination I entered, and saw her sitting there. Was she weeping ? No ; the time for violent sorrow had gone past, and, perchance, left the pale, sweet face with a grave sad look which it had never worn in former years. Oh yes, my darling had suffered —none could deny that, for I myself had just kissed the flowers which she had placed upon my tomb.

"'Go to her,' whispered a voice within me. 'She has suffered enough. Brush the tears from her eyes ; bring back the roses to her cheeks, and with one fond, sweet embrace blot out the memory of the past. For is not her love very dear to you ? What will your life be worth if you prove her false ? Better, dead man, that you were lying out yonder in the pitiless ocean or beneath that icy marble slab that bears your name.'

"My blood was up; my brain on fire. In one wild impulse I passed from the churchyard, when that pitiless unseen hand gripped me and turned me again to stone; for a devil arose within me and made me doubt again. 'Go to her?' I cried, 'not if the lawyer's story be true. Perhaps even now another hand is brushing away the tears; another voice is calling back her smiles and making the light of love shine once more in her beautiful eyes.'

"No, I did not go to Alice; but, cold and sick at heart, I returned to my desolate, ghost haunted home. .

" . . I have seen her at last! The veil between us has been lifted. I have seen her—my love! my darling!

"Let me try to be calm, and write the record down.

"To-day was an anniversary. On this day twelve months ago they brought her the news that I was dead. On this day of all days my eyes hungered for a sight of her face.

"The longing within me was becoming intolerable. Go forth I must, see her I must—but how and where?

"It was a dark day, cloudy and cold, giving every indication of a coming storm. The trees were groaning around Plas Ruthven, the old house seemed to creak and moan. As I sat at my open window I could hear the sea roaring, and see storm clouds gathering ominously in the sky.

"While it was still early in the day I left the house.

"I had no definite purpose in my mind, only a wild mass of thoughts, knotted and confused as a tangled skein, kept whirling in my head. I knew that at that

time of day the village was no place for me, so I turned back into the Plas Ruthven woods. Here at least I was safe ; were I so inclined, I could pluck off my disguise, gaze fearlessly around me, and in my old natural voice call aloud on her I loved. None would hear or heed, or, if they did, it would only be to murmur, ‘It is the ghost of Richard Glamorgan come back to-day to the place where he was born.’

“But I did nothing rash. Locks of snow-white hair still fell upon my shoulders, the folds of an old-fashioned cloak concealed my form, and my hands still grasped the staff which always helped me on my way.

“Thus equipped, and with my body bending like a willow above a stream, I walked in deep meditation through the woods.

“How long I walked I cannot say ; my mind was too much occupied with speculations as to my future to take account just then of the flight of time ; but when at length I raised my eyes and recalled my wandering thoughts, I found myself close to the bridge which spanned the river running tumultuously through Glen Ruthven.

“I raised my eyes, gave one sharp glance about me. I paused, staggered back, and gasped for breath, while a strange trembling seized me from head to foot, and a sweat like the cold dews of death broke out upon my forehead.

“The deadly solitude of the place had no terror for me, though the trees groaned wearily around, the sky was blackening above, and all the air about me seemed full of the whispering voices of the dead. I had looked at the bridge, partly covered now with oozing moss and

slime, at the river roaring and foaming below ; then my eye, restless and wandering, became fixed on a shape that stood below.

“Alice, evidently unconscious of any presence but her own, stood quietly beside the Devil’s Pool.”

C H A P T E R X X X I I .

“H A V E Y O U F O R G O T T E N M E ? ”

“My first instinct was to utter a cry, to rush forward and clasp her fondly in my arms. May God forgive me for not obeying that one kindly impulse of my nature. I paused, and as I did so the voice of my familiar, my haunting Demon, seemed to whisper in my ear,—

“‘Watch and wait, Glamorgan ; watch and wait !’

“I walked a few steps forward, leaned with folded arms on the stone parapet of the bridge and looked down.

“God ! there she stood ; the same, and yet so changed ! She was clad from head to foot in black, in widow’s crape, with a widow’s bonnet and veil. I could not see her face ; it was half turned from me, and bent above the roaring river.

“What was she doing ?—of what was she thinking ?—why was she standing there ?

“For a time she remained motionless as a statue, then suddenly she stepped forward, reached forth her hand, and plunged it into the silent water in the Devil’s Pool.

“I rose from the parapet, and staggered back like one

who had been shot. Was I dreaming? I passed my hand across my eyes and looked again. No, I was not dreaming; there she stood with the black robes clinging about her—her hand beneath the bubbling water of the pool.

“No need for any unseen force to restrain me now—no need for any ghostly voices to whisper warnings in my ear—my wild impulse to rush forward had fled, for the past, vivid and clear, shot up before my vision, and turned me heart-sick. Once before I had seen her stand like that; mine was the second hand which she had clasped beneath the water, and now with her black robes clinging about her, she had crept away into solitude to try the charm again.

“As I gazed on her in fascination she rose, and our eyes met.

“I saw the pale, sweet face I knew so well, and my heart throbbed wildly. Her name was on my lips, but I could not utter it, for my head swam, and had I not turned away I should have swooned. Unable to bear more, I left the hedge and crept into the darkness of the woods.

An hour latter I reached Plas Ruthven. I was wet to the skin, for a thunder-storm had broken over the village, and during the last hour the earth had been deluged with heavy streams of rain. Old Owen having grown uneasy at my long absence, was looking out for me; yet he did not seem much relieved at my return; something in my face startled him, I suppose, for he clung piteously to my hand—addressed me by my name.

I was in no mood to be questioned, and the mention of my name—which I had forbidden him to utter—

ruffled my already irritated temper. I flung him aside and ascended to my room.

“The chamber was occupied. Tremaine had arrived during my absence, and was now making himself at home.

“Of all men on the earth he was the one I least wished to see just then. Perhaps he read my thoughts in my face, for after one swift glance he turned his head away. His eye had lighted on my saturated clothes.

“‘The storm has found you out,’ he said, ‘though it spared me. My dear Ravenscourt, before you utter a syllable let me beg of you to change your clothes.’

“Tremaine was a cautious man, and never, even in the utmost privacy, did he suffer himself to breathe my real name.

“I withdrew, as he bade me, not because I wanted to get my wet garments off—I was not in a mood to care for them—but because I wished for a while to be quit of his presence. When I returned to the room Tremaine was gone.

“With his usual astuteness he had noticed that his presence just then was most unwelcome to me. I thought my brusqueness might have offended him and sent him back to town, and I was about to summon old Owen, when that worthy came creeping into the room.

“He had come to explain the lawyer’s absence. ‘Mr Tremaine had gone,’ he said, ‘to transact some business in the village; he would return when his business was done, and hoped to spend the night at Plas Ruthven.’

“When the lawyer returned we were both in a better frame of mind. Reflection had pointed out to me the

folly of visiting my dark moods upon Tremaine, and his business had evidently made him unusually self-satisfied. I shook hands with him cordially this time, and made him as comfortable as the house would permit.

"We sat and talked on various subjects, but avoided the one topic which was of the most interest to us both

"At length I broke the ice.

"'Tremaine,' I said, 'I have seen her.'

"'Indeed?'

"If he was curious he did not show it. Having answered me, he went on sipping his brandy and water and waited for me to speak again. I did so, eagerly—somewhat excitedly, perhaps. Having wronged Alice in my thoughts, I determined to do her justice, and, if possible, force Tremaine to do her justice too. I described her as I had seen her standing by the stream, with her black garments clinging about her, her sweet face pale and sad. When I had done I looked at Tremaine. His face was cold and sceptical as ever.

"'Yes,' he said, 'I know she has donned her black to-day. She wears it at this moment, and very pretty she looks in it.'

"'You have seen her?' I asked in amazement.

"Tremaine nodded.

"'When? Where?'

"'I have just left her in the vicarage parlour.'

"'What was she doing?'

"He looked at me, hesitated for a moment, then said,—

"'Do you really want to know what she was doing?'

"'I do.'

"'She was handing a cup of tea to Mr Philip Kingston!'

“ Three o’clock !

“ For the last three hours old Owen, coiled up like a boa constrictor, had been snoring lustily in his den. Tremaine had been sleeping as soundly, but less noisily, and I, unable even to think of slumber, had been pacing restlessly from room to room.

“ A fair still night—the earth grown fresher, for the rain was shone upon by a starlit, moonlit sky ; and in its calm beneficent beams Plas Ruthven looked less gloomy, though not less sad. How weary I felt, how my heart ached, how my head burned. Had I mistaken my own strength? Was I about to falter and fail before my task began ?

“ ‘ Alice, Alice, my darling, do they belie you, or is it true—have you forgotten me ? ’

“ Half leaning out of the window, looking at the moon-beams, listening to the sleeping world, I uttered my thoughts aloud. The words were wrung from me—they came from a heart which was beginning to feel the pangs of utter desolation. I was already realising what life would really be to me if Alice was taken away.

“ ‘ Oh, my love, my love ! if only we could lie together peacefully asleep up in the little churchyard ! or if my weary body could be at rest beneath the tomb which you have tenderly decked with flowers ! ’

“ Unable longer to bear the solitude of the hours, I noiselessly descended the stairs and wandered forth.

“ It was cooler outside—the silence seemed less ghostly ; the fresh cool air came like balm to my heated forehead ; the murmur of the sea sounded like music in my ears.

“ There was no one abroad, even the cattle in the fields were dozing peacefully, and gave me a sleepy look as I

passed by. With no definite purpose in view, I passed like a spirit through the silent shades of night.

“When I paused, the vicarage was before me.

“Silent as the night, its windows all curtained, its doors barred fast. There was her window—up yonder among the ivy leaves. I gazed at it until my strained vision grew dim ; then sick at heart I wandered back to Plas Ruthven.

“Tremaine is gone ; once more I am alone.

“A malignant fever has broken out in the village : Alice has left her home and taken refuge in Mostyn Towers. The villagers, terrified at the plague which consumes them, have abandoned gossip for a time, and think only of burying their dead, and thus Alice is left free to act, and I, poor fool, to watch.

“Regularly every night old Owen, at my request, spends an hour or so at the inn, but he can bring me little news. Nobody knows or cares about anything but the fever.

“No one notices me. Regularly every day I wander forth and watch my darling hour after hour. She has abandoned her outward badge of grief, yet her cheek is still pale. Sometimes she wanders by the sea, sometimes among the marshes, and once or twice she has come to the very verge of the Plas Ruthven woods.

“What does she think of ? What does she dream of ? Has she quite forgotten me ? Sometimes she sighs and looks at the sea ; again she gazes up at the village, and her sweet eyes fill with tears. She is thinking of the poor sufferers from the fever—not of the man who lies dead in the pitiless ocean.

“Dead man, you lie ? She sometimes thinks of you,

and when she does so she creeps into the church, and lays a fresh flower upon your tomb.

“Yes, I have seen her do this ; but then, following close upon this, I have seen things which should make the flowers wither, the dead man stir in his grave.

“ . The fever had abated, the villagers had collected their terrified wits, and life in the village fell again into its ordinary routine. Frightened folk, as soon as the cause of their fear was gone, returned to their homes. Fathers welcomed back their wives, mothers their daughters—but Alice did not return.

“I was speculating as to her delay, when the cause of it was shown me in a way that turned my heart to stone.

“One afternoon I crossed the marshes, with some mad idea of speaking to her and learning the truth from her lips.

“A wild idea, one born of my frenzy. Procrastination was driving me mad. ‘A little more of this,’ I said to myself, ‘and God will never spare me to see the end.’

“It was early when I left home ; the sun was still high in the heavens, but before I had covered the half of my road the sky became cloudy and the wind began to rise. ‘She must have left the shore before this time,’ I said, so I made straight for the gate of Mostyn Towers.

“I had walked some distance, but was yet within a quarter of a mile of the gate, when a dog bounding wildly through the fields brushed past me. In a moment I recognised it, and, pausing, looked round for its mistress. There she was, a hundred yards from me, walking slowly towards the lodge gate.

"My heart stood still as I looked upon her. Her cheek was not pale that night, her eyes were not sad, but there was upon her face a look of quiet contentment—just such a look as I had seen upon it the day when I asked her to become my wife.

"How well I remember that day! I took her little hand in mine, I looked into her eyes, and said,—

"'Alice, my darling, will you always love me as you do now?'

"'Always.'

"'And if I die?'

"'Then I should wear crape for you, and think and dream of you until we met again. If it please God to deny us happiness in this world, He would give it us in the world that is to come!'

"Those words of hers gladdened my heart at the time, but that night as I stood on the marshes the recollection of them came to me like a death knell.

"For she was not alone.

"A man walked beside her, her little hand rested on his arm, as so often it had done on mine.

"They walked in silence till they came to the gate, then they paused. He took both her hands and looked into her eyes. I crept nearer, keeping well within the shadow, and heard them speak. What he said I could not tell—it was *her* voice I heard.

"'Oh, how good you are!' she cried. 'Don't think I don't care for you, Philip—I do, I do!'

"What he said to this God alone can tell. I strained my ears, but could hear nothing—only a confused murmur. He bent his head and looked into her face; he put his arms around her and drew her to his breast; he

kissed her fondly, then, still holding her hand in his, passed with her through the gate and disappeared.

“God help me now ! .

“ . Last night at midnight Tremaine arrived. He was out most of to-day, and returned towards nightfall, looking sadly disturbed. I was over much engrossed with my own feelings to notice him, therefore he attacked me roundly.

“ ‘Glamorgan,’ he said, ‘how much longer is this mad folly to last ? to the end of the chapter, eh ? Excuse me, my friend, but I begin to think you are as mad as the benighted folk of the village say you are. You talk about loving the girl, yet you are dragging her through all the tortures of hell ! ’

“ I looked at him in amazement. He quietly went on,—

“ ‘She could be happy, she would be happy, but for a certain something well known to you and me, and dimly felt by her. That young man loves her, she loves him. She is serenely contented, except at times, when the face of her old lover appears before her, as it did two nights ago, and brings up the horrible past ! ’

“ ‘Horrible ? What horror does the past contain for her ? ’

“ ‘A good deal apparently ; at any rate, the sight of her dead lover’s face (for which I suppose you are responsible) has brought on a nervous fever, and caused some unpleasant talk. The people pitied *you* a few months ago, now they pity *her*, and say—’

“ ‘Well ? ’

“ ‘That it would have been better for Alice Chepstow if Richard Glamorgan had never been born ! ’

“‘Why don’t they add, it would have been better for Richard Glamorgan if he had never seen her face?’”

“The old man started and looked at me keenly from beneath his shaggy brows.

“‘Would they speak truly?’ he asked.

“‘They would.’

“‘Then you mean to give up this folly?’

“‘You mistake. Now that the play has been begun, I mean to see it through.’

“‘As you will,’ he replied, ‘but remember, I don’t countenance it. I wash my hands of the whole affair; whatever happens from this night forth has nothing to do with me.’

CHAPTER XXXIII.

“RICHARD GLAMORGAN LIVES!”

“THE news has come at last!—the news which for the last few weeks I have expected daily and hourly—which I have seen approaching as plainly as I have seen my hair turn grey. Yes, I have expected it, and yet it has come like a thunderclap upon me. Alice has promised to become Philip Kingston’s wife!

“The news was brought to me at ten o’clock last night. It came from Tremaine.

“‘It is private news as yet,’ he said; ‘but, since it will become public news in less than twenty-four hours,

you may as well hear it from my lips as from the lips of others. Glamorgan, I am sorry for you !'

" He held forth his hand. I roughly tossed it aside.

" ' Keep your pity for *her*; by heaven above, she'll need it !'

" He looked at me curiously, but made no reply, and I, not wishing to talk just then, shut myself up in a room alone, and sat down with my head bowed forward and pressed by my trembling hands. I sat thus for several hours. I neither recalled the past nor tried to penetrate the future. The blow which I had received that day had been the heaviest blow of all; it paralysed all my faculties and turned my tortured body to stone.

" Some time in the afternoon I was roused by a knocking at the door. I rose and let in Tremaine. He staggered back at sight of me; but he quickly recovered his self-possession, and asked me to go into the library as he had something to say.

" I promised to follow him thither, and did so presently. When I appeared at the door he was strapping up his travelling bag. He stopped as I went in. He closed the door, pointed to a chair for me, and took one himself, then he regarded me for a few moments in silence. I saw that something unusual was agitating him. At last he spoke.

" ' Tell me, Glamorgan, are you satisfied at last ?'

" ' Satisfied of what ?'

" ' Of that young lady's shallow unworthiness — of your own mad folly in ever having cared for her ?'

" I rose and walked over to the window; I made no remark myself, neither did I attempt to silence him. My meek forbearance amazed me as much as it did my

companion. Was my heart broken ? Was every vestige of manliness leaving me now that I knew her love was gone ?

"Tremaine came up and touched me on the shoulder.

"'Glamorgan,' said he, 'I want to tell you a story to-night—a curious story, which may alter the whole course of your future. Will you listen ?'

"Sullen and indifferent, I threw myself into a chair.

"'If you wish it,' I said. 'Go on ; I'm all attention.'

"Tremaine paced up and down the room, as if in agitation, then mastering himself turned sharply to me and continued,—

"'When you went out to India twelve years ago, you unwittingly took with you the love of another young girl. She herself discovered it after you were gone, and she lived upon the hope of your return. When you left, she was happy in her home, but very soon troubles came ; her mother and sister died, and she alone was left to be the hope and comfort of her father's declining years. The father was not altogether an estimable man, but he had one redeeming point—he loved his sole remaining child. Daily he watched her with jealous eyes, and he soon made a discovery which caused him considerable uneasiness of mind. He found that her thoughts, instead of being in the quiet home in London, were following the footsteps of the young fellow who was fighting for fortune in India. She watched his career with sparkling eyes, for he prospered. Then came a change ; there were stories of his ruin and disgrace. The poor child listened to these with pale cheek and tearful eyes. She suffered—ah, yes, she suffered—

but she was a steadfast, constant woman, and her love remained unchanged.'

"He paused and saw me listening eagerly, for I began to see his drift.

"Her hero returned. I remember that day so well. Years had wrought some change in him. Much bitter sorrow had left its mark upon his face; but when the girl who had dreamed of him all these years stood before him, her love for him increased ten-fold. I wonder if he saw it and knew it; I wonder if he looked in her eyes and read at last the story of her much enduring love! He stood before her like a man of stone, and made no sign."

"He paused again as if he expected me to reply. What could I say or do? I could affect to misunderstand the purport of his story no longer. He was speaking of Dorcas, of his own child. I turned and faced him. I grasped his hand and looked into his face. He was strangely moved.

"Yes, Glamorgan," he said, "you have guessed rightly. I am speaking of my child. When she stood before you that day looking with calm, grave eyes into your face, I felt that her love was unchanged and changeless, and I trembled for the future of my girl. I knew that at that moment you were a free man, and that, had you been so willed, you could have made Dorcas happy. Impulse prompted me to speak, but reason kept me silent. I thought, "The time is not yet come. His troubles still oppress him. Let him surround himself with associations of the past; let him become himself again, and then he may think of marriage."

"You told me of your wish to return home; I ap-

proved of it ; and you left us. Once you were gone, all the sunshine seemed to fade from Dorcas' life. I began to fear for her health, and remembering that she was the only thing in the world I cared for, I kept up her spirits with a lie. I hinted to her, mad fool that I was, that her love was returned !'

"I rose to my feet, and begged Tremaine to be silent. I felt that already I had heard too much, and I wished to hear no more. What his motive might be in telling me this story at such a time I could not guess, but he evidently had a motive, for he seemed determined that I should hear him to the end.

"From the course thus begun I found it difficult to retreat, and from that time forth my life at home was one perpetual lie ; but even then I could not reproach myself, for Dorcas looked happier than she had done for many years.

"Meantime I began to grow uneasy. Month after month slipped by, and, though I knew you could have few attractions in Tregelly, you still lingered in your desolate ruined home. Dorcas too grew restless.

"If he loves me, why does he avoid me ?' she said one day ; then she added quickly, 'I know why it is—it is because I am rich, and he is so very poor !'

"Would you wish to share his poverty with him ?' I asked ; and she replied,—

"I would wish to share my fortune with him—yes, papa, I would willingly give Richard all I have in the world.'

"My own consicence told me she might have hit upon the truth, and your subsequent conduct confirmed that idea. A few weeks after our conversation

you appeared unexpectedly before me, and again informed me of your wish to retrieve the past. I approved of your resolution, I gave you my best advice, my best assistance, and soon managed to put you on the right road again. I was genuinely pleased with your resolution ; I firmly believed that you had suffered too keenly in the past to rush into such a course for the future.

“ ‘He is a brave fellow,’ I said to myself ; ‘in a short time he will return with a full purse and an honoured name, and then he shall receive the precious treasure of my beloved child.’

“ ‘I was selfish in the matter perhaps ; I dreaded to part with Dorcas ; your present arrangements would leave her with me a few years more.

“ Nevertheless I went home with a sinking heart that night, but when I had eaten a good dinner, and emptied a bottle of my best port, I summoned up courage to tell Dorcas what had taken place that day.

“ The child said nothing. She was never demonstrative, Glamorgan, always quiet and subdued ; but I saw her face grow pallid as with the hues of death ; her little hands trembled and fell useless upon her lap. I saw that she was suffering keenly. I held forth my arms to her, and for the first time in her life she shrank away. At that moment, Glamorgan, I hated you as I had never hated man : but soon my hatred was consumed in consternation for my child.

“ ‘Dorcas,’ I cried, ‘if your old father’s riches can keep him he shall never go away.’

“ The promise thus quickly made was as quickly repented of, and long after Dorcas was in her room

that night I sat in my study thinking what would be the best thing for me to do. I was certainly a rich man, but my money was the result of many years of arduous toil; and the thought of handing it over to a man who had already overlooked my daughter's love, and recklessly expended a large fortune upon another woman, was by no means pleasant to me; still, the happiness of my child hung in the balance, and by that I was decided. You remember I made you the offer, not mentioning Dorcas' name, and you refused it. Then I learned that, during those few months you had been away from us, you had engaged yourself to another woman. This was the hardest blow of all, and I feared that now at least my poor child's heart would break. To deceive her still was impossible; so as soon as you sailed for the China seas I told Dorcas the truth.

"She bore it with patient forbearance, but from that day forth she changed. Her cheek grew pale—her expression more saddened and subdued—she let the trouble prey upon her life, but she never blamed you.

"Dorcas," I said one day, "tell me you have ceased to love him?"

"She shook her head sadly.

"Unless you wish me to speak falsely I can never do that, papa," she said. "When a woman once loves she never changes—dead or living, married or single, he will always be the same to me."

"During the last ten minutes I had been walking restlessly about the room, for the story was not altogether pleasant for me to hear. As Tremaine paused in his narrative I paused in my walk, and once more begged him to say no more, but he was firm.

“‘Do you think,’ said he, ‘it is merely for the sake of idle gossip that I am thus revealing the most sacred feelings of my dearest child ; no, I love her too well to make sport of her. Hitherto I have kept the story a secret, because I had no purpose to serve by revealing it. Now, all is changed—it has become necessary that the story should be told ; it is also necessary that you should hear it to the end.’

“‘I sank down silently into my chair, and the lawyer continued his tale.

“‘Dorcas spoke truly—she was unchanged ; for though she knew now that you could be nothing to her, she prayed for your welfare as zealously as she had ever done before. She hungered for news of you, and, knowing no other means of obtaining it, urged me to go down to Tregelly and extract it from your betrothed. This at first I refused to do ; but at length I yielded for Dorcas’ sake. Thus I was brought into frequent contact with the lady, and I found her exactly what the sight of her portrait had led me to expect—pretty, vain, and frivolous ; delighted at the prospect of going out to China, and of becoming mistress of Plas Ruthven, but on the whole, rather afraid of the man who was to bring her to all this. As I looked at her I said to myself exactly the same as I once said to you, “If Glamorgan dies, in less than a year she will be somebody else’s sweetheart.” Then I went back to my Dorcas and thought “how unjustly things had been ordained.”

“‘Well, the news of your death arrived. It came suddenly, and was a shock to all. Miss Chepstow fell beneath the blow, and for weeks lay raving in her father’s house, and everybody, full of pity for her, said that she

would die. There was no sickness in my house, therefore there was no pity wasted upon it. If I had said, “My child is breaking her heart because Glamorgan is dead,” society would have held up its hands in horror. Public sympathy was turned in quite another channel—we were overlooked and therefore unmolested. I alone watched my child and wondered. What had happened to her I could not tell. She did not waste her time in weeping,—her sorrows were too deep set for tears. She went about her work much the same as usual, but there was a blank look in her eyes ; and when you spoke to her you found that her thoughts had been far away ; yes, far away in the China seas with the man whom she believed to be lying there pitilessly slain.

“‘ Meantime I had lost sight of Miss Chepstow, anxiety for my child having driven all thoughts of your betrothed wife from my mind, but I was destined to hear of her before long.

“‘ Some important business at this time called me abroad. I was not altogether sorry, for I determined to take Dorcas with me, and I believed that a total change of scene might rouse her from the melancholy state into which she was rapidly falling. At first she seemed disinclined to move, but on being told that she could be of use to me she at once consented to go.

“‘ My business took me to Paris. That being finished, we travelled on to a little fishing village in Normandy to enjoy a few weeks’ rest. Dorcas was fast relapsing into gloom again, when an event happened which roused her for a time, and made her almost forget her sorrow.

“‘ We were walking one day in one of those little sequestered lanes in which the village abounds—far

away, we thought, from the sight of human footprints or the sound of human voices, when suddenly we both started and looked at one another, for a peal of laughter sounded in our ears. The laughter had in it a ring which was as joyous as the sound of wedding bells. The voice belonged to a woman. It rang out clear and full, then died. It proceeded from the lane from somewhere behind us, but the lane contained so many curves and twists that the lady, who I knew couldn't be many yards from us, was completely hidden. Now, on an ordinary occasion, an event so trivial would have been passed unnoticed by me, but this peal of laughter went through me like a knife. I seemed to recognise the voice. I listened; the laughter came again, this time it was nearer, the peal less prolonged. I looked back, but could see nothing. There was a sharp curve in the road behind us, and beyond the curve stretched an avenue of tall beech trees. As I looked the sound of heavy footsteps struck on my ear. The next moment a couple of horses emerged from the avenue into the full blaze of sunlight which fell upon the dusty road. After a hasty glance at the horses, I looked at the riders. They were a man and a woman—both young, both handsome, both in excellent spirits, and keenly enjoying each other's society. The lady, with rippling laughter on her lips and in her eyes, was bending forward in her saddle, dreamily stroking her horse's shining neck. The gentleman, who kept close to her side, was whispering those pretty things which made her look so radiant. Thus they came on, while we stood motionless. When the horses were within a yard of where we stood the young lady raised her head and encountered my earnest look. In a moment she changed;

her flushed face grew pale as alabaster, her hands trembled ; she bowed coldly to me, then, with an impatient tug at the reins, she urged her horse into a canter, and disappeared in a cloud of sunlight and dust. As she did so a hand was laid on my arm.

“‘Papa,’ said Dorcas, ‘do you know that young lady?’

“‘I do, my dear.’

“‘Who is she?’

“‘She is the young lady who promised a few months ago to be Richard Glamorgan’s wife.’

“‘I was looking at Dorcas as I spoke, and was amazed at the sudden change in her face. It hardened terribly, and for the first time I saw anger and hatred there.

“‘It is shameful ; it is wicked !’ she cried ; ‘it is enough to make him rise from the dead !’

“‘Two days later we left for home, and settled down to the dreary routine of our every-day life. From the specimens I had seen of female constancy, I am sorry to say I judged my own child. I believed that as Miss Chepstow, whose grief had gone nigh to killing her, had recovered so effectually, Dorcas’ restoration could not be far off. But I was wrong. Being once more established in her home she did the work which was required of her, attended more tenderly than ever to my comforts, entertained my guests, and grew, if anything, more patient and forbearing to everybody about her, and yet the sorrow was eating at her heart, and dragging her on to the grave. It was pitiful ; I confess my heart was breaking ; for almost the first time in my life, my soul went up in fervent prayer to God. . . . He was merciful. He heard me,

“ ‘ I went home one night more sad at heart than ever ; I had spent a wretched day. I expected a still more wretched evening. I dismissed my carriage at the corner of the street, and walked quietly round the square. I looked over at my house—that night it looked to me like a tomb. The blinds were all up, some of the rooms were lit, but there was no other sign of life. I dreaded knocking at the door ; I dreaded to look once more into the pale, wasted face of my child. At length summoning up courage I went in. Dorcas did not meet me as usual. I walked into the drawing-room ; she was not there. Then I searched the dining-room, her bedroom, her sitting-room. At last I went into my study, and there I found her. The room was in partial darkness, being lit only by a radiant moon, whose bright beams fell full upon Dorcas’ face. She was sitting in a large arm-chair, which was drawn up close to the window. She was sleeping peacefully and quietly, and looked so happy in her sleep that I dreaded to see her eyes unclose. I walked up to her, and noiselessly took a seat by her side. Being thus close to her, the moonbeams showed me what had escaped me heretofore. On her lap lay an open book, on a table beside her lay her drawing materials, and a picture upon which she had evidently been at work. I looked at the book ; it was the Bible. I read a passage, which from certain pencil marks beside it stood out clearly from the rest. It was this—‘ For I am the resurrection and the life ; whoso believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.’

“ ‘ I looked at the picture ; it was a capitally executed portrait of yourself. In a remote corner of it Dorcas had lightly pencilled in her own initials, while beneath she had written in a firm hand—“ The dead shall rise.”

“ ‘ I had just completed my survey of these things, and returned to my seat, when Dorcas opened her eyes. Never to my dying day shall I forget the look on her face. It seemed paler than ever in the moonlight, her eyes large and lustrous, but over it there crept a look of divine happiness and peace. Though her eyes were open, I thought she must be sleeping still, for she neither spoke nor moved. I believed at that moment that her last hour had come. I thought my girl must be passing from me, and in an agony of terror I took her hand. She returned the pressure, but her eyes remained fixed upon the sky. Presently her lips opened, and she murmured, “ In the midst of justice He has remembered mercy. My God, I thank Thee ! ” Then with a bright smile she turned to me and said,—

“ ‘ I feel so happy to-night, papa, for I know that Richard Glamorgan lives ! ’ ”

CHAPTER XXXIV

DORCAS’ DREAM.

“ ‘ I LOOKED at Dorcas, and for a moment could not speak. A horrible fear took possession of me, for I said to myself, “ This silent grief has turned her brain ; ” then the fear departed, and I tried to get some rational solution of the mystery. My eye now fell again upon the Bible and upon the passage carefully underlined,—“ For I am the resurrection and the life ; whoso believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.”

“ ‘ I turned again to Dorcas.

“ ‘ You have been dreaming, my dear,’ I said, as lightly as I could ; I found you sleeping when I came in.’

“ ‘ Dorcas, who had been quietly looking at the picture, turned now with a bright smile to me.

“ ‘ I have been dreaming, papa,’ she said ; ‘ that is how I know that Richard lives ! ’

“ Again that sickening dread seized my heart, but I took my darling’s hand and said,—

“ Will you tell me your dream, Dorcas ? ”

“ ‘ If you like, papa.’

“ ‘ Well, then, my dear, what was it all about ? ’

“ ‘ It was terrible,’ she said, ‘ but I am sure that it was true. I seemed to be standing upon a foreign shore watching a ship, upon whose deck a band of men were fighting—fighting with the fury of wild beasts, and the savagery of desperate men. The struggles were shocking, the shrieks heartrending, and all the air seemed gradually to become blighted with the foetid smell of blood. How long the fight lasted I don’t know. When it had nearly ended, I saw the deck of the ship ; it was covered with blood, and the mutilated bodies of the slain. Amidst the heap stood one man, covered with blood, but still fighting desperately for life. He was single-handed, and fought against fearful odds ; but he fought bravely, and one after another his enemies fell before him. At last, however, he seemed about to fall. There was only one avenue of rescue left. He rushed to the side of the ship, gave one look back at the men who stood with blood-stained knives behind him, then fell like a lump of lead into the sea. I had seen the face and recognised it. The mutilated, half-murdered man who fell into the water was

Richard Glamorgan. I sank upon my knees and prayed to God, and out of the drifting clouds a voice seemed to answer me, saying, "Whoso believeth in Me shall never die!" My dream changed. I still stood upon a shore, night had fallen, and I seemed to be quite alone. But suddenly, when I turned to go, my eye fell upon a figure which was within a hundred yards of me. The figure of a man. He stood motionless, with his eyes fixed upon the sea. Suddenly he turned, and I saw his face, and in a moment I knew it. It was Richard, but terribly changed. His face was disfigured with terrible scars, and his beautiful black hair seemed to be turning grey. There was the scar of a terrible gash in his right hand, which he raised to the moonlit sky. "I thank God for my life," he said, and with those words ringing in my ears, I awoke.'

"I took Dorcas in my arms and kissed her, and that night I too thanked God for sending a little peace to my home.

"Now I am not a superstitious man, and I must confess that Dorcas' dream possessed little significance for me. I had heard of events having been foretold in a similar manner, but then I had also heard of witch craft and miracles, and I classed them all together as things to be laughed at and denied. But because I disbelieved myself I saw no reason to shake the faith of my child, especially as it seemed to bring her peace. Your picture was placed in my study by this time, and every morning when no one seemed about, Dorcas went in to dust it with her own hand. How lovingly she lingered over the task; I have seen her gaze at it for an hour, as if trying to burn the likeness into her brain. I have seen her kiss the glass as tenderly as a

mother kisses the face of her new-born babe ; and I have heard her murmur, " Will he come to-day, I wonder ; and if he is never to come, be merciful, O God, and let me go to him."

" Meanwhile, Dorcas, having become so engrossed in awaiting the solution of her dream, had entirely forgotten the existence of the third person who had taken a prominent part in this terrible tragedy. I, having business transactions with Miss Chepstow, was brought into constant communication with either the young lady herself or some members of her family. I, therefore, knew pretty well the state of affairs in Wales. I said to myself, " If God is merciful he will let Richard Glamorgan rest in peace."

" Such was the state of things when you presented yourself, that cold October morning, at my house in Bloomsbury Square. At first I was amazed, then I felt glad ; but you soon made my gladness turn to sorrow. You spoke of Alice Chepstow, I thought of my Dorcas, and of all her suffering, her patient forbearance, and for the moment I wished that you lay at the bottom of the China seas. My one hope now was that Dorcas, seeing you so changed (for you are terribly disfigured, you know), would find her dream fade away. But that hope was soon abandoned. When you two met I watched my child's face keenly, and I saw that your pitiable plight endeared you to her a thousand-fold.

" After you had gone to bed that night I went in search of Dorcas. I found her sitting in my library, looking at your picture.

" Well, Dorcas," I said, " your dream has come true,

" Yes, he has come back," she answered quietly.

“‘Are you glad?’

“‘She looked at me with strange reproachful eyes.

“‘Glad!’ she echoed; ‘glad that he is alive? Oh! papa, how can you ask me that?’

“‘And yet, my dear,’ I answered, ‘what is it all to you? Was it for you he travelled back to England, for you he fought like a madman for his life? Depend upon it, my dear, he had forgotten your existence until I reminded him of it to-day. His only thought is of Miss Chepstow, who never once thinks of him.’

“‘I saw by the look on her face that she was suffering keenly, but I determined not to pause. Where was the use of all this suffering, all this woe? If I could not undo the past, I might perhaps be able to ward off a greater sorrow in the future.

“‘Dorcas,’ I said, ‘where is all your spirit, my dear, that you can waste your life on a man who loves another woman as he loves Miss Chepstow?’

“‘He does *not* love her,’ she replied.

“‘Not love Miss Chepstow?—what do you mean, Dorcas?’

“‘I mean what I say, papa. If he had loved her, he would never have doubted her; if he loved her now, he would never dream of testing her love for him. He knows that she has suffered, yet he does not hasten to make amends. If he tests her and finds her false, his last infatuation will fade away—and then, and then—’

“‘And then, Dorcas, what?’

“‘I think, papa, he might be brought to care for me.’

“‘She hid her face as if the confession shamed her, and I knew that I could say no more.

“‘Need I pursue the story further, Glamorgan? You

know the rest. Now that your work is done ; now that you are alone in the world, forgotten by the woman of your choice; dead to almost every other living soul, I offer you the greatest treasure which the world contains for me. There is Dorcas, endowed with all my riches, and prepared at one look from you to cast them all at your feet. Speak, Glamorgan. I am going back to my home to-night ; what am I to say to my little girl ? ”

C H A P T E R X X X V.

F A C E T O F A C E.

“ HAVING finished his story, Tremaine was silent. I too was mute, for I knew not what to say. I walked again to the other end of the room, and gazed again through the window at the dreary prospect of the wood. In five minutes I had forgotten the lawyer’s existence—I was thinking of some words which Dorcas had said. ‘ If he had loved her he would never have doubted her ; if he loved her now he would never dream of testing her love for him ; he knows that she has suffered, yet he does not hasten to make amends.’ Shrewd words, but radically false.

“ I knew now that my love was cruel and almost merciless, yet it had been strong enough to raise me as it were from the dead ; to make me cling even now to the woman who had been so fatally false to me.

“ I am a queer combination, a mystery even to myself ! A few months ago, when maddened by the hints and

inuendoes of Tremaine, I came to Plas Ruthven, I made a vow here in the dead silence of the night ; I said,—

“ ‘God—if there be a God—give me strength and patience to endure. ’ I expect no mercy (that has seldom come my way), and if I find her false, if my last hope in this world is destined to be shattered to the winds, my miseries at least shall cease. I will pluck her image from my heart, I will cast her from me, and all my bitter sorrow shall be avenged.’ Alas ! up till this moment I never knew how tenderly I had loved my Alice. Pluck her from my heart, avenge myself, and cast upon her frail frame a burden such as I had borne ? I could not, even though I felt that she had been so false to me.

“ How long I remained thus I don’t know. I was brought to myself again by Tremaine. He had walked quietly up to my side, and now laid his hand upon my shoulder.

“ ‘Glamorgan,’ he said, ‘to nearly everybody in this world you are dead. Ay, dead as last year’s leaves which lie rotting in yonder wood. Remain so. I do not ask you to arise. My little girl’s love is boundless. She is willing to become a dead man’s bride.’

“ Even now I could not speak ; and feeling how useless it was to protract the interview, I quietly shook my head.

“ In a moment the man’s face changed ;—all its softness faded. For the last hour or so he had been the tender-hearted father—that shake of my head did away with romance—he became at once the pitiless lawyer. His keen grey eyes had no tenderness in them now ; indeed, as they rested upon me they seemed full of cruel contempt.

“‘What do you mean to do?’ he asked coldly.

“‘I don’t know.’

“‘Well, I will tell you. You will remain here watching that girl till she drives you to do some desperate deed, and brings you to the gallows. Yes, my friend, as you sit here some night, with the spirits of your ancestors about you, and the wind singing its dreary requiem without, the devil that is working within you will give you his counsel thus:—“Dead man, take your bride. She shared your joys, let her share your sorrows. In the ghost-haunted walls of Plas Ruthven let her last hours be spent. The world would not pity her, for she deserves none. Has she not for her companion the man whose heart she won, and whose heart she has broken! ”’

“With a strange, wild look he turned to go. He had reached the door when I stopped him.

“‘Tremaine,’ I said, ‘you told me awhile ago that you were going home.’

“‘I am going home.’

“‘Will you tell Dorcas—’ I began, when he stopped me.

“‘Excuse me, my friend, but I shall tell Dorcas nothing. I shall never again mention your name to her, unless it be to inspire in her breast a feeling of contempt. You have brought enough sorrow to my hearth; you shall bring no more. Go your own way, bear your own burden, and meet single-handed the end, whatever it may be. I have no more to say in the matter. Henceforth it will be to me as if the last of the Glamorgans had passed away, and as if Plas Ruthven with all its gloomy associations were plunged at the bottom of the sea.’

“He opened the door, closed it gently after him, and left me alone.

"I made no attempt to follow him. Where would have been the use? The words he wanted me to utter I could not speak, and any others would have been worse than dross. Nevertheless, I was profoundly impressed by what he had told me, and from the bottom of my heart I pitied the poor old lawyer and his only child. . . .

". . . Twelve o'clock. Another night of restlessness for me; another night of torture, which is beginning to season me for the everlasting tortures of hell. I suppose I must sleep, or my body, tough and sinewy as it has proved itself to be, will give way before my work is done. Well, since Nature refuses me even one short hour of peaceful repose, I must take by force what she denies. There is my sleeping draught ready to my hand; but before taking it I must note down one or two of the strange events which have wound up this miserable day.

"Some few hours ago Tremaine returned to London. Before leaving he sought me out to shake hands and say good-bye. This strange concession on his part amazed me. I could only conclude that due reflection had brought him to the same conclusion as it has brought me—namely, that for all the sorrow that had been brought to his child he alone had been to blame. Never, by word, look, or deed had I encouraged her love. It was he who told her I loved her, it was he who encouraged her to wait and hope when he knew there was no hope. But of all this, I said nothing. Now that he had hardened, as it were, it was useless to re-crminate or offer sympathy. The only thing to be done was to treat the events of the day as if they had never been.

"He had arranged to walk to the station. I volunteered to accompany him at least part of the way, and we set out together. We met no one, and said little. When within some distance of the station we parted, and I again turned my steps towards home. Home! how the word echoed through my heart. Little more than a year ago it would have been sweet to dream of. With that word lingering on my lips my brain would conjure up the picture of a cheerful fireside, a crowd of happy faces, and, above all, *her* face, the prettiest and happiest there. Well, a few months had come and gone—reality had replaced visions. I stood at last face to face with the truth. I said to myself, 'So this is what I fought and strove for; it was for this I conquered death, and surmounted all the tortures of hell, to stand alone, under a cheerless sky, to feel that I am forgotten, and to see my friends all fade away from me like the melting of last year's snow.'

"It was a cold, dreary-looking night. Most of the villagers were enjoying the comfort of their fire-sides; some few obliged to be abroad met me on the road, and with a sidelong glance, and a surly 'Good-night, neighbour,' passed quickly on. I did not hasten. The dreariness of the night, the solitary look of road and fields, were both welcome to me. At least they were better than my home—the dreary, ghost-haunted rooms of Plas Ruthven.

"I had walked for some time, and was growing weary, when a strange thought came to me. It was this—to pay a visit to my own tomb; to take up the duties which she had cast aside; to lay there some little tribute to the memory of the poor devil whom all the world forgot.

"I passed up the hill, entered the churchyard, walked half round the building, and approached the principal door, when I suddenly paused. I was not alone—another figure, that of a woman, was moving through the graveyard towards the church door. One look, and instinctively I shrank back further beneath the shadow of the projecting wall. She was wrapped up warmly in the ample folds of a fur-lined cloak; her face was turned from me, and yet I knew her as surely as if she stood looking into my eyes with her little hand in mine. Was she going to visit the dead man's tomb—to perform in secret those sacred rites which should have come as love tokens from her hands; had she in her breast that night one little feeling of regret for the poor murdered man who had given his life to her? I resolved to wait and see.

"She walked slowly, almost hesitatingly, quite unconscious of any one being near. Sometimes she paused and looked about her, as if afraid of the silence of the place and the presence of the smouldering dead. She carried in her hand a wreath of immortelles, which I knew she meant for me. The sight of these white flowers chilled me; they seemed to make her sin blacker a thousand-fold. They made her as false to the living as she had been to the dead.

"My heart turned sick within me; my whole body grew cold. I was about to turn away, when her movements again kept me riveted to the spot. She had reached the church door, pushed it open, taken one step across the threshold, then one step back. She hesitated, leant as if faint against the porch, then recovering herself, she closed the door again, and, with the flowers still in her hand, turned quietly away.

“ She walked more quickly this time. She had only gone a few steps when she paused again. A flat tombstone was near her ; she sat down upon it, rested her head against the marble cross, and turned her face to the sky.

“ My God ! could the stories I had heard be true ? Had not my own senses lied to me when they told me she was false ? There she sat, my Alice, as I had pictured her in my dreams, waking and sleeping, as I had seen her in my delirium, when I had seen her gazing upon me behind the black shadow of death. There were the lips which had murmured so magically to me, the eyes which had gazed with such steadfast faith into mine. In a wild frenzy of passion I stretched out my arms to her, and cried,—

“ ‘ Alice, come to me, my love, my love ! ’

“ She started, she rose from her seat, she stood listening ; she gave one wild, terrified look about her, then, with a moan, she clasped her hands, staggered a few steps, and fell senseless upon the ground.

“ Terrified at what I had done, and reckless now at the thought of discovery, I rushed forward and lifted her from the ground. I clasped her in my arms ; I placed her head upon my bosom ; I kissed her lips, her eyes, her cheeks ; I named my darling’s name. Then my wild fit of passion passed away, reason returned. I laid her gently on the grass, with her head upon the tombstone, and tried to woo her back to life.

“ Life came ; I saw the colour creep into the pale cheek and bloodless lips, and I knew that my work was done.

“ I drew back.

“ A few minutes more and she slowly opened her eyes.

At first she seemed dazed, and stared blankly at the sky ; then she looked with wonder at her opened cloak and loosened hat. She felt the grass which was her bed, the tomb which made her pillow, and remembered all. With a wild startled look upon her face she leapt to her feet, and stood face to face with me.”

C H A P T E R X X X V I.

AMONG THE GRAVES OF THE DEAD.

“ ALL sign of the dead man had fled—the figure she gazed on now was the weary, worn-out figure of the mad tenant of Plas Ruthven.

“ I had drawn my cloak about me—pulled my hat lower over my eyes, and leant, with all the trembling feebleness of age, upon the stout stick which was my constant support. My head inclined a little forward, my eyes, veiled by the broad brim of my hat, were fixed keenly upon her face.

“ The sight of a human being seemed to startle her almost as much as the sound of that strange voice from the grave. At first she seemed inclined to turn and fly ; then she commanded herself sufficiently to stand her ground. She cast one hurried glance around her ; then she turned and looked again at me.

“ I neither moved nor spoke ; the magic influence of the night kept me silent ; the strange novelty of her presence rooted me to the spot.

"At length this strange glamour was broken. . . .

"Do—do you want me, sir?" she asked quietly.

"I pulled myself together, assumed my old man's voice, and answered briefly. I said I had been passing through the churchyard and had found her lying fainting among the tombs.

"She shivered, drew her cloak about her and gazed again, half fearfully on every side. There was no living soul to be seen; the moon still shone serenely from the sky, lighting up the tombs which were so thickly scattered at our feet. A strange position for a young girl to stand in; she seemed to feel it so, yet she was afraid to move—the presence of the stranger oppressed her even more than the presence of the dead.

"As for me, I could do nothing. The lovely face of my darling, so pale and sad, kept my eyes fixed; the moonbeams tenderly kissed her cheek. I saw that her little hand was trembling; she gazed on the cold, desolate prospect around her as if for help, and I longed to whisper,—'Courage, my darling, for help is here.' Yes, once again, my better angel gave me counsel. It said, 'Pluck off your disguise, hold forth your arms and say, "Alice, I am here; your dead man has arisen, and has come to claim you. Look at me—I am old and wearied out with pain and sorrow. I am hideously scarred by the cruel cutlasses which tried to kill me. I am lonely, penniless, outcast; but, my darling, love and trust will make amends for all!"'

"I looked at her—I hesitated; during that moment my last chance fled.

"Alice gave a cry, ran a few steps forward, then bent caressingly above a dog which had galloped up the

gravel path, and now stood joyfully licking her cheek. Two minutes later a young man, who had closely followed the dog, took her hand and placed it on his arm.

“‘Oscar knows your movements better than I do,’ he said, as he wrapped her cloak about her, and put back, as I once had done, some stray locks of her hair. ‘I wanted to look for you in the village, but Oscar would come here, and he was right.’

“Suddenly he seemed struck by the paleness of her face, the strange restlessness of her manner, and asked anxiously,—

“‘What is the matter, Alice?’

“‘Nothing, Philip,’ she answered.

“She turned, gazed uneasily about her as if to ascertain if I was still in my place. She found that I was gone.

“Not wishing to be discovered, I had withdrawn again, and stood now beneath the friendly shadow of the church wall. I watched the lovers depart, then I came forward and sat down upon the tomb from which she had risen. Suddenly my eyes fell upon something white which lay amid the graves. It was the wreath of immortelles.

“I lifted it with tender hands, gazed upon it with tear-dimmed eyes, then putting it beneath my cloak, I carried it with me down to Plas Ruthven.

“A wreath of immortelles! here it lies gleaming coldly in the dim light of my room—thrown carelessly aside, as I have been—forgotten, as I am—but remaining in the darkened ghost-haunted dwelling until the hour shall come when the sea gives up its dead.

“ Nothing has come of our strange adventure in the graveyard.

“ All day I have waited for a sign. The silence has told me a tale—it tells me that Alice is deceiving this man as she once deceived me.

“ She has consented to become his wife. His demands upon her are just—she believes them ungenerous. He says ‘ You must become a part of me—your being must blend itself into mine : your thoughts must be mine, your life mine ; ’ she says with her lips, ‘ I give you all these things,’ but in her heart she knows she lies.

“ Womanlike she loves to dream over her victories, to think sometimes of the poor devil who laid down his life for her ; but the other must not know of this—she must receive his caresses with sparkling eyes and smiling lips, and keep her secret hidden.

“ God, how maddening it is to be shut up like a criminal ! to see and know nothing. I burn for news ; so as I can’t move I’ve sent Glendower down to the village to gather the rank weeds of scandal for me. What will he learn, I wonder ? Patience, Glamorgan, a few hours longer and you will hear of more treachery, more heartlessness ; well, it will only make the future pregnant with much more woe.

“ Glendower has come back. I’ve got my news. Here it is.

“ The old man came in with an ugly leer that made me long to strangle him. He sat down by the fire and rubbed his hands, chuckling with glee.

“ ‘ Such news, Measter Richard,’ he said ; ‘ such news,

dear, and such fine plans for the future days of my fine lady there ! Look ye, now, he's fixed a heap o' money on her, and she's fixed her wedding day. She's to be married up in the little church where they put your tomb, Measter Richard, and it's to be done on the first o' May. 'Tain't for old Owen to speak, but, says I, " 'Tis a queer day for her to fix on. Trouble will come of it, Mrs Lubin ; trouble will come of it!" What do you think they said, sir ?'

"Well, what did they say ?"

"That no trouble could come to *her*. that the only trouble that ever did come was brought by the man what lay dead and cold out in foreign seas. Look ye now, Measter Richard, they said, "Everybody knows 'twas a lucky day for her when he died. Her father and sister knowed it a long time ago, and now she knows it too." I laughed to myself when I heard 'em talk. I thought of you up here, and I said to myself, 'Twould maybe be lucky for some if he *was* dead ; he's a Glamorgan ; 'tain't for nothing he'll be easily forgot 'tain't for nothing he's marked and scarred, and afraid to show his face in the light o' day. 'Tis her day now ; she may try to bury the dead, but they won't be buried. She belongs to my master, and if he's a Glamorgan he'll take what's his,—yes, take it in spite of all.'

"He looked into my face with a diabolical grin. I wa thinking too much of what he said to reply. He edged his chair nearer to me, and whispered again,—

"She don't think much of Plas Ruthven now, measter. 'Tis like its measter and old Owen,—worn out and sick to death of it all ; but there was a time when she liked it—when she thought there was plenty

o' money hid away in the poor old place. She had fine visions once before, and she's got 'em now—but they ain't came to pass yet, sir. . If I had my way, Measter Richard, I wouldn't let you be laughed at and sneered at; I'd bring sorrow and shame to them as has brought sorrow and shame to you !'

"Active preparations for the wedding are going forward ; it is to be a general festival—everybody is to share the joy. 'Not one must be left in the cold,' says the bridegroom ; 'we will even, for the time being, condescend to contemplate the weary sorrow-stricken face of the mad tenant of Plas Ruthven.'

"Stay, is it his magnanimity, or is it the bride who remembers one moonlit night when she lay cold and senseless at the mercy of this old man? At all events, the note has come : it invites me to take tea at the vicarage.

"The young couple will be there to-night—enjoying themselves to their heart's content. I too could be there ; yes, I could gaze upon her, speak to her, and perhaps succeed in arousing in her breast some feeling of pity for the miserable murdered man.

"A wild idea, worthy creation of a madman's brain. I must think of it—but first let me examine my face. Heavens! how changed I am! Would she know me? Never! My hair is almost grey ; the livid scars have grown ghastly, and there is a wild look in my eyes which even I cannot understand. I am indeed the mad tenant of Plas Ruthven. On the day when this wild life began, Richard Glamorgan died.

"Was Tremaine right when he said she might shudder

to find me so changed? If she thinks of me at all it is as the man who left her, not as the hideously marked being who comes to claim her now.

"If I stood before her to-night to claim my own, would she turn from me and cling to him? Merciful Heaven, if she did that, I think I should kill her! It would be the end of all!

"Five o'clock. I have three hours more for reflection. I wonder what I shall decide upon to-night.

"Eight o'clock. Glendower has just come in; he tells me it will be a fine night for the madman to take his walks abroad.

"The night is dark, the sky cloudy; there is a cold wind blowing in from the sea, and a steady rain falling; inclement weather which drives the villagers home.

"He asks for an answer to the rectory note. I have none. If I carry out my mad idea and go, well and good; if I do not go they will call my silence eccentricity, and think of it no more.

"Ten o'clock. The rain is still falling; the sky looking blacker than ever; the wind whistling eerily as it comes across the rising sea.

"Before I am half through the Plas Ruthven woods my clothes are saturated, and hang heavily upon me; but the darkness affords friendly shelter. I hurry on having reached the lodge gate I take the road which leads to the vicarage, and never pause until I reach its door.

"I raise my hand to knock; my courage fails me; I draw back; I look at the house; it is brilliantly lit;

the windows are curtained and no sound comes forth. Still the rain falls with a dreary patter upon the already sodden ground, and the wind continues its melancholy moan. I am safe from observation to-night ; at least in such weather no one would willingly stir abroad.

“I enter the vicarage garden, and creep close up to the window. I have discovered an opening through which I can look into the room.

“It is empty no, I am wrong . a second glance corrects the first and tells me that the room is occupied.

“I see a man and a woman.

“They sit before the fire ; he holds both her hands and talks to her eagerly, while she looks thoughtfully into the flames. She is dressed in spotless white, and wears a little crimson flower upon her breast : he looks at the flower with a strange smile ; she unfastens it, and places it in his coat. He lifts her face and kisses it, then her head falls upon his shoulder and remains there.

“Do they want *me*? I am about to answer the question by turning away, when the door of the room opens and other figures flock in ; who they are I know not, my eyes are fixed only upon one. I see her rise—walk restlessly up and down the room, then leave it.

“Two minutes later and the blind is quickly drawn up from the bedroom window above ; the sash is lifted, and Alice looks out.

“‘Oh, what a miserable night,’ she says, and she moves away.

“She has not closed the window . I step forth, take a letter from my pocket, attach a stone to it, and

cast it up. I have thrown with unerring precision ; it has fallen at her feet.

"Standing in the road I can see her clearly, for the room is brightly lit. She starts, but utters no cry. She lifts the letter, opens it, and reads the words inside. What is she going to do ? Scream or faint ? She does neither. For several minutes she stands like a figure of stone staring at the paper which she still holds firmly in her hand. Then vitality returns to her ; she rushes to the open window, and, despite the rain which is now falling heavily, leans out.

"'Who's there ?' she cries ; 'there must be some one, and whoever you are answer me.'

"There comes no answer, but the cry of the wind and the sound of the falling rain.

"She withdraws from the window and rushes from the room. What will happen next ?

"The darkness of the night no longer affords sufficient shelter for me. I retreat among the trees ; just as I have done so I see something white, and I know it is Alice. She comes quickly down the vicarage path ; she pauses within a hundred yards of the spot where I lie concealed.

C H A P T E R X X X V I I .

"ALICE, SAVE YOURSELF."

"WITH her thin white dress clinging about her, and the rain beating pitilessly upon her uncovered head, she

stands and listens. She walks into the road, then pauses again.

At last she speaks,—

“‘Who is it?’ she says. ‘Where are you? Is there no one here?’

“Again she stands as if listening; she walks hurriedly up and down the road, looks keenly on every side, but sees no one. My black cloak and the friendly laurel bushes conceal me; her deadly white dress betrays her.

“She stands again at the gate; this time she speaks softly, as if to herself.

“‘It is cruel, shameful, wicked! What have I done to any one that I should be tortured like this?’

“She crosses the lawn and sits down upon a dripping garden seat; a few minutes later her lover finds her there.

“‘Alice!’ he exclaims; ‘you *here* in this dress! Why, what’s the matter?’

“She answers him as she did in the churchyard a few nights ago she tells him a lie.

“‘Nothing!’ she says.

“She rises from her seat and clings to him. He passes his hand gently over her head and shoulders.

“‘My darling,’ he says, ‘you are wet through—it is enough to give you your death. Alice,’ he continues, holding her hands, ‘you have a trouble which I do not share. You have given me your love—my darling, give me your faith—trust me for once, and tell me all!’

Again that lie comes black and burning from her lips
—again she answers,—

“‘It is nothing!’

"Then suddenly she clings piteously to him, and sobs out in weary heart-broken tones,—

"Take me in, Philip ! take me in !"

"My eyes see, my ears hear, but even now my stubborn senses refuse to understand. Wretched and despairing, more sick at heart than ever, I creep back to Plas Ruthven to await the end.

"Three weeks have passed ; active preparations for the wedding are still going on, though for several weeks the bride-elect has been ill, and has not left her room.

"The report from the vicarage is that Alice is suffering from fever, brought on by severe cold. At first the villagers accepted this explanation, and pitied the invalid ; then, having nothing better to occupy them, they began to doubt it—to scent mystery, a mystery which it would require all their heads to solve.

"At length Alice, having grown tired of confinement, throws off her illness and comes forth ; her appearance and manner confirm the idea of the mystery, and set the people wondering still more. She is thin, pale, and weary ; her eyes wear a wild, restless look. She starts if any one addresses her suddenly, then grows angry and confused if they apologise or look with any sympathy at her pale face. What does it mean ? Does she still love me ? If so, she will never go to the altar with that man, and I may try her to the end

"Alice, my Alice ! love for you, my darling, has made me what I am ! I must be cruel, only to be kind !"

"The days whirl past—nearer and nearer comes the

fatal wedding day. Is she going to the altar? My God, if she does go, what will the end be then?

"I met her last night. She was walking with her lover, near the Plas Ruthven woods; my steps were noiseless; when her eye fell upon me I was close to her side. She started—clung to her lover's arm, and begged him to turn.

"'The woods are ghostly at this time of night!' she said. I knew that the sight of my face had terrified her; it called up recollections of the past.

"More news; more mystery for the superstitious fools in Tregelly.

"Some time ago the report was that the honeymoon would extend over one month; at the end of that time the young couple were to return, and to settle down to enjoy their married felicity in Mostyn Towers. Consequently dozens of workmen were employed to make alterations to suit the taste of the clergyman's petted child.

"Suddenly the work was stopped. There will be no home coming: on the day of the wedding Mr Kingston is to take his wife across the Channel, and at her urgent request will keep her there until twelve months have passed away. I listened to it all with a smile,—pitying the fools who make their plans with so much certainty of success.

"'Man proposes, but God disposes,' I said; 'that wedding day may have a different ending to what we all expect!'

"Glendower peered curiously at me, and gave his diabolical laugh.

"'So say I, Measter Richard, so say I,' he muttered;

'and that bride, pretty as she is, and proud as she is, may have a different bed. Look ye now, I know the carriage that's goin' to take 'em ; the horses that's going to draw 'em ; and the man as is going to drive 'em ; old Owen don't prowl about the inn and put his money into Mrs Lubin's till for nothing ! It's all in yer own hands, sir ; it's all in yer own hands ! . . . Measter Richard, the night before that wedding day I shall see that carriage ; I shall be alone with it, sir ; I shall be alone with the horses, and if you give me twenty pound sir, only twenty pound, I can lift a deal o' trouble off the mind o' that groom !'

"I looked up. I began to understand him, but I was in no mood to hear his plans that night.

"The days fly past ; every day Glendower's face grows brighter—the villagers are too much occupied to think of the mystery which troubled them so sorely a few weeks since : all goes well.

"Will she pause ? There is time yet, every night my battered heart cries out,—‘Alice, save yourself, and pluck me for ever from this eternal hell !’"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE BRIDAL OFFERING.

"THE night before the wedding ! How has the day been passed abroad ?

"God knows,—I only know that I have not moved from the friendly shelter of Plas Ruthven. I seem

indeed like one newly arisen from the dead ; my limbs feel cold and lifeless ; my brain is dull as that of a senseless brute ; my weary eyes gaze, as they have done for the last three hours, upon a wreath of immortelles,—the wreath which she in her terror cast aside, which my hands tenderly uplifted, and which is now brought forth to add to the decorations for her wedding day.

“ My Alice’s wedding day ?

“ Yes ; she rejoices, because she says to herself, ‘ He can neither see nor hear ; he lies in the pitiless ocean. Why should I cry when he cannot see me ? Why should I break my heart when he can never know ? Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we also die ! ’

“ With my wreath hidden by my cloak, I leave Plas Ruthven and take the road to the church. Some figures pass me ; the men glare, but the women murmur, ‘ Poor old man ! ’

“ The church is empty ; it bears the signs of busy hands. It is prettily decked with flowers. There is a new altar cloth of white and gold ; the book lies open ; just above it, within a wreath of roses, I read these words,—

“ *Those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder !* ”

“ He joined us ; we were man and wife, though no priest’s words were spoken. Before this very altar she took my hand, gave me her pledge, and said, ‘ Husband ! yes, I will call you husband, though it may be for the first, and last time.’ She is *my* bride ; in taking her I take my own.

“ I walk gently down the aisle ; I pause before my tomb.

“ It is cold and neglected : on every side of it flowers

are arranged, as if to hide it from the sight of the bride. I bring forth my offering ; I hang it upon the outstretched hand of the marble angel. I step up to the altar, stand upon the very spot where *she* will stand. I look back at the tomb ; there hangs the wreath, white, and cold, and spotless, and within the deathless circlet of flowers are the words which *I* have written, and which *she* must read—

‘THE DEAD SHALL RISE.’

“I leave the church ; my task there is done, my last warning spoken ; a few short hours and then the issue will be known.

“It is a calm still night, with every indication of a glorious morrow. The sky is cloudless, the wind hushed, the sea without a moan. I note all this as I walk back to Plas Ruthven. The door is opened for me by Glendower. He shuts it and bolts it ; he follows me up the creaky stairs, and closes the door of my room before he speaks.

“‘You didn’t trust to old Owen for nothing, Measter Richard. It’s all ready, sir, all ready ; and better than I could hope for. Well, it’ll be a queer day. I’ll just step down to the inn, sir, and when I come back I’ll tell ye all I know.’

“He took his departure, and left me alone in Plas Ruthven.”

HERE ENDS THE DIARY OF THE TENANT OF PLAS
RUTHVEN.

C H A P T E R X X X I X.

M A N A N D W I F E.

“WILT thou have this man to thy wedded husband ;
and keep thee only unto him so long as ye both shall
live ?”

It was Mr Chepstow who asked the question ; it was Alice who answered.

“I will !”

She spoke the words without hesitation, and as she spoke she raised her eyes and timidly extended her hand. The look and the gesture, noted by every person in the church, spoke for themselves. They seemed to say, “I take you because I love and trust you !” but suddenly the eyes, which for a moment had looked full into Philip Kingston’s face, wandered restlessly round the church, and rested sadly upon a tomb. She started ; her pale cheek flushed, her whole body trembled. Upon the tomb hung a wreath of immortelles, and on the wreath was written—

“THE DEAD SHALL RISE.”

On the morning of Alice Chepstow’s marriage, everything seemed propitious : the success of the day had certainly been worked for, and so far the result of the labour more than satisfied everybody concerned. An event of similar importance had seldom previously occurred in Tregelly, and was certainly not likely soon to occur again. Now that he had stepped into his brother’s shoes, and now that poor Richard Glamor

gan was dead, Mr Philip Kingston was the most important as well as the most popular man in the village ; while his chosen bride was the prettiest and favourite daughter of the beloved pastor who had toiled amongst them for five-and-thirty years. To be sure, when the news of the contemplated marriage first became known, it occurred to some that Miss Alice Chepstow was not all that she should be, else, after the terrible calamity that had befallen her, she would not so soon be able to reconcile herself to the idea of becoming a bride. But after all this was really no concern of theirs ; if the young lady's conscience was clear no one else had a right to complain ; so they soon dismissed this part of the affair from their minds, and set themselves to prepare for the wedding day. The date fixed for the marriage was the first of May, an unlucky day, most people said, but then Alice was noted by this time for doing unlucky things. She was known to laugh at what she termed the superstitions of the villagers ; but hitherto her defiance of them had brought her sad rewards. Her first bridal dress had been finished on a Friday. What had been the result ? There it hung in her wardrobe, spotted with blood, and side by side with the widow's dress, which had so quickly replaced it. Those were trophies of the dead man's bride ; and were, like the past, by this time hidden and forgotten.

Yet in spite of all this, and it seemed to many in defiance of it, Alice had fixed upon another fatal day on which to become a bride.

" Well, we're all born but we ain't buried," said Mrs Lubin, shaking her head behind her bar. " For my part

I wish the day was well over, and the poor maiden off with her husband for good!"

"Well, you won't have long to wait," growled old Owen Glendower, who happened to hear the remark. "Four days more, Mrs Lubin, only four days for the creature to live alone up there. But she don't look very happy, ma'am, at what's before her."

"Happy!" returned the landlady contemptuously; "do you expect her to be happy in Tregelly after what's past and gone? I suppose you'd like her to do what *you* do, mister,—shut herself up in Plas Ruthven, and never get sight o' a soul!"

The old man rubbed his hands and chuckled.

"No, I don't; I don't expect her to do nought but rue the first o' May. She's a sly one, Mrs Lubin. I've looked in her face, and I know it. 'Tisn't for nothing that she's asked him that's to be her husband to take her right away to foreign parts, and never bring her back for a whole year to get sight of the village where she was born."

The good landlady turned away and said no more, for old Owen, either maliciously or intentionally, had touched upon one point which she could not discuss. It did seem strange, she confessed to herself when there was nobody by to hear, that Alice should have made such a condition, "to be taken away from Tregelly on her wedding day, and not to be brought back to it until the anniversary of that day came round again."

When Marion Chepstow heard of the arrangement that had been made, she was startled into an exclamation of anger as well as surprise; and she took the earliest opportunity of remonstrating with her sister on the subject

"Who told you of it?" asked Alice quietly.

"It is common talk in the village!"

"Then it is a pity the villagers haven't something better to talk about."

"Alice, such an arrangement as that casts a reflection upon you. Remember the past!"

Alice rose hastily from her seat.

"No one has any right to remind me of the past," she said.

She walked across the room, took a chair at the far end, and sat down to read.

For a moment Marion watched her. She saw the pale face bent low; the trembling fingers nervously toying with the leaves of the book; the eyes looking so sad and tearful, wandering restlessly from page to page—then she went over and knelt by her sister's side.

"Alice, dear, forgive me," she said. "I never meant to pain you so."

And Alice gave her hand to her sister with a weary sigh.

"Don't let us talk of it any more, Marion," she said. "I want to be alone."

Marion left the room, heartily wishing for the hundredth time that the wedding day was over, or that it might be postponed for ever.

At length the day came, and, strangely enough, a gloomier day had seldom dawned in Tregelly. Still, when the wedding bells rang out in merry peals and the villagers came trooping in crowds towards the church, the sunlight was faintly peeping through the still gathering clouds. Everything went well, until the bride, in casting her restless eyes around the church, saw the

immortelles upon the tomb. Everybody saw the look ; everybody saw, too, the sudden pallor and agitation which the sight of the flowers produced ; but the only man who rejoiced over it was Owen Glendower—who had come like the rest to see the wedding, and who now sat as near as possible to his master's tomb.

After this incident, a strange feeling ran through the crowd of people present—and the whole air of the church became oppressive, as with thunder gathering before a storm ; the bride, sadly unnerved, gave her answers in a low, tremulous voice—almost as if she feared to awaken the dead ; while the bridegroom, holding her hand firmly in his, tried to assure her of his comfort and support.

It was indeed a strange wedding.

Though the day had been looked forward to with unusual eagerness, it brought little satisfaction now that it had come—for while the bride and bridegroom stood at the altar, it seemed as if the dead man dominated the scene, interposing like a black shadow between them and the sunlight of heaven.

At last the benediction was spoken, the two were pronounced man and wife, and everybody in the church seemed glad that the ceremony was over.

And Alice? How did she feel, what was she thinking of as she stood there holding her husband's arm ? How pale her cheek was, how sad the look of her tearless eyes ! For a moment the quivering of her lip indicated that tears were coming ; but they were quickly suppressed ; she took her husband's arm and walked down the aisle of the church with a firm, steady step ; smiling sadly upon those who thronged around with merry

greetings ; and gazing as she passed with strange wistfulness upon the tomb.

The ceremony over, the temporary gloom dispelled, the wedding party returned to the vicarage, while the villagers, after screaming themselves hoarse, and waving their banners in the air, betook themselves to the village green, where a tent had been erected, and refreshments were served to one and all. After the eating and drinking was over, there was a country dance upon the green, a dozen fiddles played, and the church bells rang out again with joyous peals.

Meanwhile those within the vicarage were enjoying themselves as much, though not so boisterously, as their friends outside. The ceremonies of the wedding breakfast had passed off well ; healths had been drunk, and speeches made ; the old clergyman, in a few touching words, had thanked all present for their kindness to his child. The bride had taken of her bridal robe and donned instead a pretty travelling dress of velvet and fur, and now the whole company adjourned to the drawing-room.

The young couple seemed in no hurry to depart ; there was no reason why they should be ; they had but to travel twelve miles that night, to sleep in the neighbouring town and continue their journey on the morrow. Their luggage had preceded them two days before, and the carriage which was to take them away was now awaiting them at the inn. Yes, there was plenty of time for them to sit and chat over the future, and as so long a time must elapse before Alice could return home again, no one seemed anxious for her to go.

At last the carriage was sent for, and after much

affectionate leave-taking, Alice went down to take her seat. The guests had gathered in a little knot at the door ; in their midst stood Philip waiting for his wife. At length she came. She was very pale by this time, but her eyes were tearless ; she put her hand into her husband's, and looked up into his face with a strange, sad smile. She stepped across the threshold, and suddenly drew back ; the rain, which was now falling steadily, was beaten fiercely into her face. She turned cold from head to foot with superstitious dread.

“Oh, Philip, do not let us go ! ” she said.

“Alice ! ”

“It—it is such a dreadful afternoon,” she continued nervously. “See how the rain is pouring, and I am sure I saw lightning just now ; it is so unlucky on our wedding day ! ”

But Philip only laughed.

“You are nervous, darling,” he said. “But remember you are safe enough with me.”

So Alice, growing somewhat ashamed of her fear, suffered herself to be led away.

Despite the rain, which now fell in a steady downpour, despite the lightning, which shot in rapid flashes across the ever darkening sky, a small crowd had gathered around the house ; cheer after cheer rent the air ; old slippers were thrown ; handfuls of rice were scattered on the wind. Amidst a wild whirl of confusion the carriage moved on and was lost to view among the gathering shadows of that ominous afternoon.

C H A P T E R X L

THE ABDUCTION.

THAT afternoon was remembered by every one in Tregelly as one of wild unrest. Soon after the carriage left the vicarage the rain fell in torrents, vivid flashes of lightning rent the air; the wind blew a hurricane; it shrieked down the chimneys, and rattled at the doors as if to tell the inhabitants that trouble was afoot. But most of them having eaten and drunk plentifully, were now more inclined to sleep than to speculate about the weather.

"What can be the matter with me?" said Marion Chepstow, who was restlessly pacing her room. "Am I growing superstitious, or is it the natural reaction of over-excitement and over-work? I am sorry we did not let Alice have her way. I wish she was safe in the vicarage—it was a terrible day to let her go from home!"

She walked over to the window; lifted the curtain and looked out. She could see nothing—but she could hear the wind which now whistled dismally, the rain which fell in a steady pour, and what was that? Marion listened intently; it seemed to her that above the noise of wind and rain she could hear a human cry. For a time she stood listening intently; then she staggered back, half blinded by a flash of light which shot across the heavens; a heavy peal of thunder followed,—then all was still.

Meantime, what was happening abroad?

The carriage having left the vicarage rolled briskly on its way ; the horses had been fed with the best oats in the village, and proudly threw up their heads and put on their best pace, as if conscious of the precious burden behind them, while the coachman, feeling the influence of the wedding wine, joyfully cracked his whip, and tried to enliven the tedium of the road by singing merry scraps of song.

It was growing late, and thick mists of evening were driving rapidly in from the sea ; the rain still fell ; lightning played from time to time in the heavens, and heavy peals of thunder were heard. A wild afternoon, giving every indication of a stormy night. But now that they were well started, the young couple were by no means depressed. They had twelve long miles before them certainly, and their way lay along a dreary and little frequented road ; but if the horses kept up anything like their present pace they would be stabled before long, and the young couple would be comfortably housed.

They were proceeding briskly on their journey, and had left the village well behind, when there was a sudden stoppage ; the carriage was jerked violently to one side, pushed backward, then swayed like a tossing ship from side to side, and stopped short with a crash !

Alice gave a cry, and clung nervously to her husband's arm ; but Philip, after quieting her, stepped out to ascertain what was the matter. Some damage was done, but where and in what way it took a little time to ascertain. It appeared in the first place that one of the horses had shied at the lightning—had plunged, backed and kicked, and had finally broken the straps which bound him to the pole.

What was to be done? There stood the horse, still panting and quivering from fright, and with the broken harness dangling about his legs. Philip took down one of the carriage lamps, and by its aid ascertained the full extent of the damage.

The harness was badly broken; a piece of strong rope would have been useful in patching it, but as there was no rope to be had, the only thing to be done was to continue the journey with the one horse. After a little more delay the carriage moved on again with one horse to draw it, the other following fastened behind.

Things were by no means so pleasant as they had been before. The carriage being too heavy for one horse, moved slowly over the rain-drenched road. Philip was wet, and every moment the storm seemed on the increase.

"If there was a house on the road, I should say shelter there and send for fresh harness," said Philip; "but there is no house within seven or eight miles."

Now, had Philip's mind not been fully occupied by the troubles of the road, he might have been astonished at the strange conduct of his wife. On stepping into the carriage she had wrapped her travelling cloak about her, taken her seat in a corner, laid her head wearily upon the cushions, and closed her eyes. Thus she remained. He had taken her hand; it lay cold and passive in his; now and then when the lightning flashed more vividly than usual, she crept as if for protection a little nearer to her husband's side.

Suddenly the tedium of the journey was broken again. Another crash, a heavy scraping along the ground, then a sudden stoppage, while the whole carriage seemed to

sink and collapse. The horse still tugged at the pole, but the carriage refused to move.

Thoroughly awakened from her torpor now, Alice leapt up with a cry. It seemed to her as if the body of the vehicle was dividing. Philip jumped out, Alice followed; the coachman descended from his seat, and the three stood helpless in the road.

Philip took a lamp to examine the carriage; in turning to do so he saw his wife.

"Alice, keep your seat, dear, or you'll be wet through."

"I can't, Philip; the carriage is in two!"

Aided by his lamp he looked, and found that she was right. It seemed that the axle had quite broken down. Still, though it was impossible for the carriage to go on, it was strong enough to afford a comfortable kind of shelter. He put Alice in again, and when she was settled, turned to the driver.

"What's to be done now?"

The man dolefully shook his head: as far as he could see, there was nothing to be done.

"But we can't remain here all night, man! How far have we come, do you think?"

"About three miles I should say, sir."

"Humph! that leaves nine still before us. If the afternoon was fine we could put the lady on horseback and leave the carriage here. That's out of the question in a storm like this. The next best thing is to get another carriage to take the lady on!"

The man stared in stupid astonishment.

"How am I to do that, sir?" he said.

"Why, by riding back to Tregelly, of course. Quick;

jump on to the horse's back, and see that you have a closed carriage here in less than an hour ! ”

In two minutes more the man was on the horse's back : and the horse was scattering the mud on every side of him.

Philip put his head in at the carriage window to see how his wife was getting on. She was seated in her corner again with her feet up on the opposite seat. Her face was very pale, but she seemed quite calm. He told her what he had done.

“ I'm afraid the fellow's wits are a little muddled with drink, but the rain will cool him.”

“ Why didn't you go with him, Philip ? Suppose they should not send ? ”

Philip started ; considering all the circumstances it seemed to him that the question was a strange one.

“ Why, because there was no necessity, my dear ! ” he replied ; “ and even if there had been, I should have hesitated to leave you here alone ! ”

He looked around him as he spoke, and shuddered. Every mile of the road was dreary ; but they were now in the very dreariest part of all. On either side of the road arose tall trees, whose branches intermingled and formed a dreary canopy above ; while beyond again stretched the most desolate parts of the Plas Ruthven woods.

Alice leaned back once more in the corner of the carriage, while Philip walked uneasily up and down the road.

A strange bridal day ! A strange ending to that fatal first of May ! As Alice sat in her corner of the carriage, listening to the dreary downpour of rain, to the heavy

peals of thunder, and watching the fierce flashes of lightning which rudely rent the sky, she grew uneasy. Having no one to talk to she began to think. Her thoughts were not pleasant, for they carried her back to the past.

She rose ; she was trembling violently, and feeling very cold. She put her head out of the window and called to her husband. In a moment Philip was beside her, holding her trembling hands. Her excitement amazed him.

"There is nothing to be frightened of, Alice !" he said.

"I am not afraid," she answered quickly. "Go along the road and listen ; try if you can hear the man returning."

"Returning ! Why, Alice, he can't have got to the village yet !"

"Take the other horse and ride after him ! You will be quicker than he will !"

"And leave you here alone ? I shouldn't dream of it, dear. There, sit still and try to rest. It will be all right soon."

Again she returned to her seat, and Philip, after looking at his watch and finding he had still an hour to wait, continued his restless walk up and down the road. The storm was increasing ; the rain fell more gently, but the lightning played almost incessantly in the sky, and with ceaseless crashes the thunder roared directly overhead. The terrified, half-blinded horse pranced and reared, kicked at the carriage and tugged at the rein which held him ; and Philip, looking round, believed he read in the storm the cause of his wife's strange restlessness and fear.

An hour passed. The storm had somewhat abated. Alice had grown almost hysterical—the man had not returned.

Philip, utterly at his wits' end, was wondering what to do, when his wife's voice recalled him.

"Philip, *do* take my advice and ride back ; something has happened, I am sure—"

"But I can't ride off and leave you here ! "

"Oh, don't think of that ! Be reasonable, Philip ; what can happen to me *here*, three miles from anything or anybody ? There, hurry away ; I promise not even to move till you come back again ! "

At last he yielded, suspecting no evil, anxious only for the comfort of her whom he held so dear ; he kissed her cold lips, sprang on to the horse's back and rode away.

The horse was a spirited creature, pretty fresh from the stable, and being, moreover, frightened at the storm, it went at a good pace. Occasionally Philip drew rein to listen ; he could hear nothing ; it was so dark by this time he could scarcely see an inch before him.

Suddenly he pulled rein and listened. A horse neighed ; he went on at a slow walk and soon came upon the animal standing by the roadside.

Philip looked at it, scarcely able to believe the evidence of his eyes. He dismounted from his own horse, threw the reins across his arm, and walked up to look more closely at the beast. No, there was no mistaking it,—it was the very one on which the man had galloped along the road more than two hours before. It stood now, drenched with the rain, firmly tied by its bridle to a tree.

Utterly amazed, Philip looked around for the rider. After some little search he found him,—a black heap lying on the roadside, drenched with the rain and apparently fast asleep.

He shook him, and pulled him on to his feet. The man glared stupidly around, passed the back of his hand across his face to wipe away the rain, then fixed his dull eyes upon his master.

"The matter, sir?" he muttered; "well, I don't rightly know. I felt a knock on my head and I fell on the road, and I don't know no more."

"Have you been to Tregelly?"

"No, sir, the villains set on me here!"

"Villains! what villains? When I rode up you were lying in a drunken sleep."

"I was stunned, sir, that's what it was; they stunned me, and then they tied up the horse. There be bad men out to-night, Mr Kingston, all along this road. Maybe they took me for a gentleman, sir, and wanted to rob me, and didn't find out till I was on the ground. They can't be far off, sir. I'll ride on and get the police. I'll put the villains in the dock—"

Philip heard no more; seized now with wild unaccountable fear, he leapt on to his horse's back and galloped furiously back to the spot where he had left Alice.

There stood the carriage just where he had left it, but empty. The door was open; and Alice was nowhere to be seen.

C H A P T E R X L I.

M Y S T E R I O U S W A R N I N G S.

THE first shock of the discovery over, Philip saw nothing in this occurrence to greatly alarm him. Though the

carriage was empty, it was not necessary that anything serious had happened to his wife. She had doubtless grown nervous at his absence, and had stepped out of the carriage, in spite of the rain.

He called her name ; there was no answer. He leapt on to his horse's back and galloped up and down the road ; all was desolate as the grave. What did it mean ?

"Alice!" he cried again. The cry was brought faintly back to him, and answered by a thunderous roar.

Wild and terror-stricken, Philip now went back to the spot where the broken carriage lay. All was just as it had been before ; there was no doubt whatever that his wife was gone. . .

Darkness fell, and found Philip Kingston still upon the road, looking into the carriage where he had last left his wife. In his hand he held her hat, which he had found crushed, torn, and liberally bespattered with mud, while his eyes rested upon a dark crimson stain which disfigured the padding of the carriage door—an ugly spot of blood. He shivered, and as he looked again his heart went cold as a stone.

There were two policemen near him ; they had been fetched by the coachman from the neighbouring town, and they had begun to take notes of the situation. The scene was one of wild disorder, but there was little or no clue to the missing lady. The ground, soddened with the heavy storm of rain, had been so torn up by the galloping horses that to trace footsteps was utterly impossible, but the police were inclined to believe that great violence had been used. The hat must have been torn off in a struggle ; one of the lady's gloves, rent asunder, had been found close to the carriage, trampled deep in the mud ;

and the blood-stain confirmed them in the belief that some serious crime had been committed.

The first thing to be done was to get rid of the husband. After much persuading, they induced him to gallop back to the village, and take the news to the rectory, while they continued their search, firmly believing that it would end in the discovery of the body of the murdered bride.

Meantime, the terrible news was rapidly spreading abroad ; by ten o'clock it was all over the village, carrying consternation far and wide.

The exact truth of the story no one knew, but every one had his or her version ; and each version, though it differed materially from the others in most things, tallied with them in one—the strong condemnation of the unfortunate bride.

No one had much pity for Alice ; they conscientiously believed that she deserved none. She had always been a flirt, they said ; flirts were always heartless, and never came to any good ; she had broken the hearts of two brave men, and not content with that, she had ended by bringing eternal trouble upon two happy homes.

"It's what I always expected of her," said old Owen Glendower, who had emerged from the gloomy shadows of Plas Ruthven to gloat over the news ; "didn't I say that no good ending would come to her. I knowed it when I looked in her face. She cared no more for Measter Kingston than she did for my poor master. It was money, money, money. She's broke the hearts of both of 'em, Mrs Lubin, and God 'll bring her sins back to her."

He stopped suddenly ; in raising his eyes to look at Mrs Lubin, he encountered those of Philip Kingston.

Philip had entered the inn quietly ; he now stood right before the old man. His face was pale as death—twenty-four hours before he had been a young happy contented looking man, he now seemed old and weary.

“Were you speaking of my wife ?” he asked, looking sternly into the old man’s face.

Glendower moved uneasily : even he, malicious as he was, could not help feeling pity for the man before him.

“I wouldn’t say a thing that could hurt *you*, Mr Kingston,” he said.

“Then don’t you dare to speak of my wife. Whatever has happened, *she* is not to blame. If I hear another man speak of her as *you* have spoken, I’ll beat him like a dog !”

He turned, left the inn, and walked straight up to the vicarage.

Here all was still as death, it was as if some dear one had passed away, as if all mourned her, yet being ashamed of their grief, dreaded to mention her name. He walked through the garden ; his footsteps attracted the attention of Alice’s dog ; it crept from the shrubbery where it had been hiding, and came forward to lick his hand. He reached the door ; he tapped gently with his knuckles, and the servant let him in. The girl had been crying, she hung her head, and noiselessly led the way to the parlour, where he found Marion. She came forward to meet him.

“Have you any news ?” she asked eagerly.

He shook his head.

“I have been back to the place, examined every inch of the ground, but can discover nothing. If footprints

have been there, the heavy rain has washed them all away."

Marion's face grew very sorrowful as she walked back to her seat; for again, despite herself, the dreadful suspicion which she had been fighting against, took possession of her heart. She began to think that Alice must be dead.

"How is Mr Chepstow?" asked Philip.

"Just the same as when you left him this morning. The blow has fallen heavily upon him, Philip. Alice was his pet, and though he does not give up all hope, I know he will never be the same again. I tried to rouse him; but he bade me draw the blinds and close the doors, and leave him in peace!"

• • • •

The day passed, evening set in, and still there was no trace and no news of Alice. Most of the houses in the village had been searched; information had been sent to the papers, and on every public place in the village placards were posted offering a large reward to any person who could give information concerning her.

The sum was a large one; the inhabitants of Tregelly were poor; Philip honestly believed that through this medium he would gain information about his wife.

Hours passed on; the tempest in the village was becoming unbearable; every one was suspected, and every house was searched.

Philip, unable to bear the agony longer, had gone to the Towers, and there alone wildly awaited the information, which he hoped might be brought to him, and while he was waiting he began to think; to try if he

could in any way unravel the terrible mystery, and gain any clue as to the whereabouts of his wife.

But the more he thought, the more perplexed he grew. That Alice had been a consenting party to the flight he did not for a moment believe. If she had meant to leave him, why did she marry him? She had done it of her own free will; indeed, she had even come to him herself and asked him, with tearful eyes, to let the wedding be quickly solemnised.

He remembered that day so well. She had come alone to Mostyn Towers—had found him alone in his room, and had put her arms around his neck and burst into tears. The sight of her pale cheek and tear-dimmed eyes both pained and alarmed him. He tried to soothe her, then asked her what was the matter. She shook her head.

“I cannot tell you, dear,” she said; “but first tell me truly—would you like me to set you free?”

“Alice!”

“Don’t think I wish it, Philip, I do not—but I am not what I once was, and I have been thinking it might be better far for you?”

“Then, my love, think of it no more. What would life be worth to me without my darling’s love?”

“You are so good—you are all too good to me. Philip, if I brought shame and sorrow to you, it would break my heart.”

The scene which had seemed strange to him then, seemed stranger now in the light of what had come to pass. What was the secret which she would not tell him, but which had preyed so much upon her mind? Was it in any way connected with the strange and

startling events which, during the last few weeks, had happened to him, and which he had kept a secret because he had dreaded to disturb Alice's already troubled mind.

"Perhaps," he said to himself, "I hold in my hand the clue to the whole mystery. The secrets which I kept for her sake must be secrets no longer. Since all other means have failed, it is time for me to speak."

"Half-an-hour later the police inspector arrived, and was shown at once into Kingston's room.

"I am sorry to say my news is unsatisfactory," he said. "We have come to our last resources; we can do no more. I have posted my men in different parts of the village to watch and wait."

He was about to depart when Philip stopped him.

"One moment. I have two or three things to show you which may give you the clue you want. First read this."

He took out his pocket-book; drew from it a letter, and handed it to the sergeant, who read,—

"If you wish to marry Miss Chepstow, do so at once, or the ceremony will never be performed. A FRIEND."

"When did you receive this, Mr Kingston?"

"A month ago."

"How?"

"With my other letters. It came through the post, and was placed upon my breakfast table in the usual way."

"Did you show it to any one?"

"No. I was amazed at receiving such a letter, and

resolved to show it to Miss Chepstow. Certain complications prevented our meeting for several days, and by that time I had forgotten all about the letter. At last, three days after its receipt, I started to go to the rectory. When I was half way I met Miss Chepstow, who was coming to me. She was very much agitated. Her first words were an echo of the letter I had received. She asked me to hasten on the wedding day. Immediately I remembered the letter. By a few questions I discovered she knew nothing of it, and I resolved to say nothing lest I might cause her pain."

"And you kept your resolve?"

"Yes. We fixed our wedding day, and set ourselves to work to prepare for it; we had both a good deal to do. Alice—Miss Chepstow—was continually with her dressmaker. I was occupied superintending the alterations to be made at the Towers. I spent every evening at the vicarage; my horse was stabled at the inn, and about twelve o'clock I usually rode home. One night I lingered longer than usual. My horse was brought up and held for me about an hour at the gate. When I mounted him, it was nearly two o'clock, raining slightly, and so dark I was compelled to let the animal find its own way. We proceeded at a slow trot. I imagined that every one must be in bed, for there wasn't a light to be seen anywhere; but when I was about half way home, and trotting along the road which cuts through the marshes, a figure leapt lightly from the hedge, and seized my bridle rein. The horse, brought thus suddenly to a stand-still, reared frightfully, and with a swift turn of the hand I brought my whip down upon the ruffian's face. In a moment the horse was free, and, quivering

with fright, started at a full gallop for home, while I still grasped a piece of paper which had been thrust into my palm. As soon as I got home I looked at the paper. I have since kept it with the letter. Here it is ! ”

He held forth a crumpled dirty piece of paper, on which the sergeant read these words,—

“ If you love Alice Chepstow, avoid her. She can never be your wife ! ”

“ What did you do now, sir ? ”

“ I still said nothing to Miss Chepstow ; but I knew that there was some one in the village who was determined to keep us apart, and I determined to find out if possible who that some one might be. I believed I had marked my man, and should know him ; I looked for a livid mark across the face. I saw none. I made strict inquiries, but learned nothing—the mystery seemed utterly impenetrable. Well, nothing further occurred, and it seemed to me that the villain, finding I was not to be intimidated, had abandoned his design. The letter and paper still lay in my pocket-book, but were now almost forgotten. Meantime the state of Miss Chepstow’s health alarmed me. She was nervous, harassed, and evidently troubled by a secret which she would not divulge. It occurred to me that the same means which had been used to intimidate me was now being tried upon her. I endeavoured to gain her confidence, but could not ; so I let things have their way, comforting myself with the reflection that all would come right after the wedding day.”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ The night before the wedding,” continued Philip, “ was spent by me at the vicarage. All the arrange-

ments had been so well executed that everybody seemed pleased, and even Alice herself was less nervous than she had been for many days before. When the evening was half over she asked me if I would like to see her wedding dress. I expressed my willingness, and followed her upstairs. She took me to a room, opened a press, and showed me a mass of white silk and net hanging inside. I looked at it for a moment, then asked her if she would like to do something to please me. She answered quickly that she would do anything. ‘Then, my dear,’ I said, ‘put on your wedding dress that we may criticise it. I daresay we shall see very little of it to-morrow.’

The sergeant bent eagerly forward. Philip continued,—

“She did not answer. Her face went white as that of a corpse, and her hand trembled so violently she almost dropped the lamp. Amazed at the effect of my words, I asked her what was the matter, but before she could speak I knew the cause of her fear. Once before she had tried on a wedding dress ; once before she had tripped downstairs to be criticised in it ; but instead of listening to compliments, she had learned the news that her betrothed husband lay murdered in the Chinese seas. My thoughtless request had reminded her of that terrible time. Inwardly cursing my own stupidity, I begged of her to think of my request no more, but to come with me back to the parlour. She had recovered herself by this time, and was evidently resolved to fight against her fear.

“‘I will put it on,’ she said. ‘But not in this room. Jane shall carry it down for me. Do you go back to papa and Marion, but don’t say anything until I come.’

" We went downstairs, I carrying the lamp this time ; the maid and Alice bearing the various articles belonging to the wedding dress. They went into a room on the ground floor, while I returned to the one which I had lately left. Mr Chepstow and Marion were still there ; we sat and chatted for what seemed to me an interminable time. I was just thinking of going in search of Alice, when we were all startled by a terrible cry ; a cry, it seemed to me, half of fear, half of joy. It rang through the house and finally subsided into a low sobbing moan. In a moment I was on my feet, and seizing the lamp from the table, I hurried to the room where I knew Alice must be. There I found her. She wore her bridal dress ; but she looked like a corpse, and she was clutching at the window-sill as if for support. The moment I entered the room she rushed towards me, and then fell sobbing bitterly upon my breast.

" What had happened ? There stood the maid who could have told : but she seemed almost as frightened as her mistress, and besides, just then we were none of us able to inquire. By this time Alice was sobbing convulsively upon my shoulder ; and it seemed that the best thing to do was to put her quietly to bed. After a while she went away with her sister, and I questioned the maid."

" Well, sir, what then ?"

" At first the girl seemed disinclined to speak ; but after much pressing she said that just as Alice was about to leave the room, she had asked her just to take one last look to see that everything was right. She turned, started, then with a wild cry pointed to the window. She saw, she said, the face of Mr Richard

Glamorgan, gazing at her through the panes. ‘Of course, sir,’ the girl added, ‘she was wrong, for Mr Glamorgan, we all know, has been dead and buried these two years. I daresay she did see a face, for the blind wasn’t drawn, and the room was lit up splendidly ; it was some boys from the village that frightened her, I’m sure, and when she screamed they’d run away.’

“I accepted the girl’s explanation, and believed it to be a true one, nevertheless I was sadly disturbed in my mind.

“I left the vicarage somewhat earlier than usual that night, and ordering my horse to be taken back by the groom, walked home across the marshes. My mind was full of the strange event of the evening. I was growing seriously alarmed at the state of Alice’s health, and wondering what I could do to rouse her from the morbid condition into which she was sinking. She was changing terribly ; her face bore all the marks of shocking mental pain. I knew that some villainous scheme to torture her was being successfully carried on ; and I wondered how I could discover the workers of the scheme, and above all, how I could bring it to an end. I felt glad that my wedding day was so near ; glad that for twelve long months I should have her to myself—far away from these dreary, heartbreaking scenes.

“Musing thus, I reached my home ; let myself in with my latch-key, went softly to my study, and sat down to think and plan again. There was a little fire burning in the grate, and a shaded lamp, which was turned very low, stood upon the table. I turned up the lamp, knocked the fire together, and sat down in my easy-chair, with my back to the window. How

long I sat thus I don't know. I was deep in plans for the future, and took no notice of the passing on of time. Suddenly I started; the sash of my window was hurriedly lifted and dropped. I leapt to my feet; sprang to the window. It was closed; no one was in the room. I turned to lift the window and leap out, when my eye was attracted by a piece of white paper which lay on the carpet at my feet. I lifted it, opened it out. Here it is."

He handed another piece of paper to the sergeant, who read these words,—

"Beware of marrying Alice Chepstow. She is a dead man's bride!"

"Another threat, sir."

"Yes, and written in precisely the same hand as the last, and the villain who was doing it all had a moment before been within half-a-dozen yards of me. Hurriedly thrusting the paper into my pocket, I leapt out of the window and began to search carefully all round the house. But I could find nothing. The villain, whoever he was, had safely made off after leaving the paper behind him."

Philip paused; the sergeant looked up inquiringly.

"Is that all, sir?"

"That is all. You know what has happened since, so I need not recapitulate. My idea is that the villain who threatened me has made good his threats by carrying off my wife."

"I think so too, Mr Kingston. I also think that the next house to be searched is—"

“ Well ?”

“ That old house in the woods—Plas Ruthven.”

“ Plas Ruthven !” Philip stared amazed. “ Plas Ruthven !—a dreary, ghost-haunted dwelling, peopled with spirits from the other world, and tenanted only by a madman whom nobody knew !”

“ I beg your pardon, sir,” returned the sergeant respectfully, “ it is inhabited by another man—one Owen Glendower !”

“ Well ?”

“ It seems to me he’s the only man in the village that would have an object in frightening the lady, and in robbing you. Having got her into his possession he could take her nowhere but to Plas Ruthven.”

“ But why should *he* do this ?”

“ Ah, why indeed, sir ? Why are half the crimes in the world committed ? I daresay he’s got good enough reasons for what he’s done. He loved his master ; when he died, he resolved to spend the rest of his life mourning him. He thought Miss Chepstow should do the same. When he found she didn’t she roused his anger, and for his dead master’s sake he resolved to be revenged. As his threats were unheeded he grew desperate and plunged into crime. Yes, Mr Kingston, I shall go up with my men in the morning and search that house.”

To-morrow morning ! Philip was on his feet in an instant.

“ Either you or I will do it to-night !” he said. “ Think of my wife in Plas Ruthven ! Alone in that ghost-haunted place, with a madman, and a wretch who could be pitiless enough to bring her to such a pass !

Good God, the thought is terrible ! Yes, you shall go, and I will go with you. I'll make you a rich man if you give me my wife to-night ! ”

“ Mr Kingston ! ”

“ Well ? ”

“ If I promise to go now, sir, will you promise to stay *here* ? ”

“ No. Why should I ? ”

“ Because it is just possible we might find the lady dead ! ”

CHAPTER XLII.

UP AT PLAS RUTHVEN.

MEANWHILE, where was Alice ? Only two men in the village could tell ; those two were Owen Glendower and the tenant of Plas Ruthven.

Early that morning, when Philip Kingston, weary with his fruitless search, was galloping up to the rectory to tell his terrible news, Alice was lying upon a couch in a strange room, gazing into the face of a man.

She seemed in the full possession of her senses, yet she did not attempt to move.

She wore her travelling dress, splashed with mud and soaked with rain ; her hat had disappeared, and her hair had fallen down. Her gloves had been stripped from her hands, which the man was now chafing between his own. How cold and lifeless they felt ! He

stroked her cheek, kissed her cold lips, and passed his hand across her bewildered eyes.

When he lifted it they remained closed. She had sunk again into unconsciousness. For a moment Glamorgan looked at her. Then he gently placed her hands upon her breast, rose from his seat, and walked quietly up and down the room.

His work was done—his victory achieved ; and now he paused, and asked himself, “Have I done well ?”

He was thinking, not of the present, but of the past —of that terrible journey through the woods, when, with the rain beating into his face, and the lightning playing in the storm-racked heaven above, he had carried the unconscious form of Alice in his arms, and had hidden her in Plas Ruthven.

He had been like a madman then, and, with this wild madness still upon him, he had torn off his disguise, and revealed himself to her the moment her swoon passed away. Yes, the two had at last stood face to face !

Alice had looked upon him at last ; for one moment she realised the terrible truth—the dead had risen. And in that moment her inmost soul had been revealed to the man who had tortured her so cruelly. He told her that he lived, and with a cry of joy which rang from end to end of the dreary dwelling, she sprang into his arms.

“Richard !” she cried, “oh, my love, my love ! They told me you were dead, and I thought I should never see you, but God is good. He sends you back because He knows I am going away. Kiss me, dear ; kiss me, before I die !”

Her arms were round his neck, her sweet face held up to his. Dazed and speechless he held her to him ; he kissed her lips ; as he did so her weary eyes closed, and she sank again, lifeless in his arms.

Dead ? No, God was not merciful enough for that ; the terrible scene had overpowered her, that was all, and she had swooned away.

For a time he held her to him fondly, passionately, then he carried her across the room, and laid her gently down ; he put back the hair from her face, stroked her hands and moistened her lips. He bent above her whispering her name, but she gave him no answer now.

He stooped down and looked at her, and he knew at last how much she had changed since he went away.

Was this the blooming Alice of two years ago—the laughing, confiding girl who had put her hands into his and said, “I love you”? Sorrow and suffering had set their marks upon her—he saw them now. Her face was still beautiful, but oh, so sad and pale and thin ! He kissed her cold lips again, and as he did so his eyes swam with tears.

She moved, sighed wearily, passed her hand across her brow and opened her eyes ; they wandered round the room, they sought his face ; she gazed steadfastly into his eyes ; this time she did not know him.

“Alice,” he murmured as he gently stroked her cold white hands ; “Alice, my darling ; I was mad, but I never meant to do you harm, for I love you—I love you ; speak to me just one word !”

She neither moved nor spoke.

He had achieved his purpose. His wrong was avenged ; there lay his victim, a pale, sad girl, whose

greatest crime had been to love him, and whom he had brought to shame and despair.

The clock struck five. He started, and a new idea entered his brain. It was not too late to atone—even now he might save her. He had but to take her in his arms to carry her to her husband's home, and say, "Take her from me, she is good and pure and true. Through me she has passed through hell; but now she shall taste of heaven. I will hide myself in the shadow of the grave and never molest her again!"

He walked to the window, opened the shutters and looked out; the storm had ceased, dawn was breaking cold and clear; yes, there might be time yet; in a few hours the story would be known, and it would be too late. He closed the shutters, and walked back to the sofa on which she lay. Her eyes were open, and in wild fascination she gazed upon him; when he approached her she put up her hands in horror, as if to keep him away.

Seven o'clock. While Alice's name was being branded with a suspicion which she could never clear away, she herself was wildly looking at the man who had brought her so much woe.

She had listened to a wild, mad story which her troubled mind could only partly understand.

"Do you mean," she said presently, "that you let me believe you dead, in order that you might watch me? you let me pass through all this trouble in order that you might ultimately bring me to shame?"

"Alice, you don't understand."

"Oh yes, I do understand. I know all now; you

are the tenant of Plas Ruthven, the old man who has many times met me face to face. You saw what I suffered ; you knew that I suffered needlessly, and that one word from you would bring my torments to an end ! May God forgive you, Richard !”

“Alice, will you listen to me ?”

“Yes, if you will,” she answered wearily, “I will listen.”

She leant forward, held her trembling hands over the fire, turned her face away, and listened to his tale. What a story for him to tell, for her to hear. It came from burning lips and aching heart ; it laid bare to her the soul of the man,—it told her the whole truth ; but it came too late.

He ceased ; she rose, staggered towards him with outstretched arms, then shrank away.

“God help us !” she cried. “God help us both !”

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE WEDDING RING.

A FEW terrible moments of silence and shame ; then Glamorgan raised his head and looked at her. She had gone over to the window, opened the shutters, lifted the sash, and turned her pale face to catch the morning breeze.

She could see nothing but the leafless trees which surrounded Plas Ruthven ; she could hear nothing but the distant murmur of the sea.

But she was not thinking of either ; her tortured soul was praying for peace.

“ If I could only die,” she murmured ; “ if I could only close my eyes and sleep ; or open them and know that this is an evil dream ! O God, have mercy upon me ; my load has been too much to bear, and now my heart is broken ! ”

She put up her hand to hold her aching head, and as she did so her eyes rested upon a little circlet of gold. Her wedding ring ! In a moment all the past—the dreadful troubled past—flashed back upon her mind. She recalled the months of torture—through which she had been made to pass ; her marriage day ; the terrible scene upon the road ; and, lastly, she tried to realise the shame and sorrow which she had brought to the man who had loved her only too well.

She left the window and hurried towards the door ; her way was blocked by Glamorgan.

“ Where are you going ? ” he asked coldly.

“ Back to my father, and—and—my husband,” she answered. “ They shall not suffer as I have done. I cannot take away the shame ; but I may set their fear at rest.”

He looked at her strangely—he took her hand, and held it tenderly in his.

“ Alice,” he said, “ is that the first prompting of your heart ? You know that I have risen from the dead—you know that I have the clammy taint of the grave upon me, and have passed through all the tortures of death, and now at the eleventh hour I have risen up out of the shadow of eternity to ask for recompense. I come to you, to the only being in the world to whom I have a

right to come, and you say, ‘You come too late ; my love is dead. I have other ties, other claims ; and as for you, since you are not lying in your grave, remain as you are, a living corpse, entombed in the ghost-haunted dwelling of your ancestors.’”

He paused, but she said nothing. He clasped more closely the hand which he held, and spoke again.

“Alice,” he said ; “Alice, my darling, this is harder to bear than all the tortures of the grave. Not one look, not one word of love. Years ago when I came back to Plas Ruthven—a hardened heartless block, believing all women to be heartless and cruel as the grave—it was your sweet face which gave the lie to my bitter heart-broken thoughts. I looked in your eyes, and I said to myself, there is yet in the world one woman who is capable of truth and fidelity ; one woman in whose hands I would fearlessly trust my life and happiness. Yes, Alice, through good and evil I never doubted you—it only rent my heart to think that others could not believe !”

“Who dared to doubt me ?”

“Many. I heard that you were like your sex, shallow and inconstant, and I said to myself they sully her reputation and my honour. If I could only *prove* that she was true. The opportunity came, my evil genius whispered to me, ‘The time has come ; put her to the test, and then the great joy of meeting will make amends for all.’”

“And so you came to spend your days in torturing me and bringing me to shame ?”

He looked at her silently for a moment, then roughly threw aside her hands.

“You speak of your torture ; what of mine ? Remember I came back to England a homeless, friendless man,

with but one hope to cling to in all the world ! I said to myself, ‘ What have I left to live for ? Home friends are all gone, and yet for the sake of one little girl I cling to life. If I had never met her, I should have stood heedless on the ship and let the Chinese murderers do their work—’ Well, I came to find my place already filled ; to find that the woman I had trusted most of all, had been the first to forget me ! ”

She looked up quickly ; she held out her hands towards him ; then quietly drew back. It was not her place to comfort him now.

“ Tell me,” he said, “ that my eyes and ears have both deceived me ; tell me that I heard the true ring of your voice an hour ago, when you threw yourself into my arms and said, ‘ I love you ! ’ ”

He paused again. She did not answer him ; he held out his hand ; she quietly turned away.

“ Let me go,” she sobbed. “ If you have any pity for me, let me go home ! ”

“ You wish to go ? ”

“ I do—I do ! ”

“ Then go—my madness is over, it will be better for us both that we should never meet again ! ”

Without another look towards her he passed out of the room and left her there alone.

Alice stood speechless and horror-stricken—then she quietly walked over to the hearth and sat down, shivering before the fire.

For her dress, soaked with the rain, clung clammily about her ; and her heart felt faint and weak with weariness and pain. She was free now : yet she made no

attempt to go, but sat like one sick unto death, with her sad eyes fixed upon the flames.

Hour after hour went by : the flame of the lamp upon the table grew fainter, then died ; the burning logs turned to cold white ashes upon the hearth ; the room grew dreary and bitterly cold.

Thus the day wore on, and when the crimson sunset illuminated the west, she rose from her seat still stiff and cold, stretched herself upon the couch, closed her eyes, and prayed to God that she might die. Still death did not come. The hours crept on, daylight faded, and over the earth there crept again the dreary darkness of night.

Alice opened her eyes, to find the room in darkness ; she went over to the window again to drink in a breath of air.

It was a calm, still night ! the trees were scarcely stirring, and the sea was solemnly still. She stood thus leaning with folded arms upon the sill, when the door of the room opened, and Glamorgan came in.

He carried in his hand a lighted lamp, which he set on the table, then turning, saw her still there. He started, walked over and touched her, as if disbelieving the evidence of his eyes.

“ Why are you here ? ” he said in a cold, hard voice ; “ this is no place for you ! ”

She shivered at the tone ; her lip began to quiver, but she bit it until the blood came.

“ If it is no place for me,” she answered quietly, “ why did you bring me here ? ”

“ Because I was mad enough to think life wouldn’t be worth living without you. You have cured me of my madness. You are free to go.”

Again her teeth pressed cruelly upon her lip ; her tears rose ; she resolutely forced them back. She left the window, walked over to him, and looked up into his careworn face.

"Richard," she said, "suppose I go ; what then ?"

"You want me to make amends for the wrong I've done. Well, you shall have your way. I'll take you to your husband. I'll clear you to your friends, and then like Diogenes with the lantern, I'll continue my search for a faithful woman, and, with God's help, perhaps some day I'll find one. Dry your eyes, Alice, it's not your fault, but His who made you, that you have faltered and failed !"

She turned quietly away from him without another word.

C H A P T E R X L I V

THE SEARCH IN PLAS RUTHVEN.

SHE walked over to the window, pushed it open, and again leaned out.

Her cheek was burning feverishly, but all within her breast felt cold and dead. What could she say ? What could she do ? Again her breaking heart cried, "God be merciful, and let me die !"

Suddenly she was startled ; the sound of voices broke the stillness of the night ; lights flashed through the darkness.

She looked and listened, the sounds grew louder, the

lights, which were evidently carried in the hand, came nearer and nearer to Plas Ruthven !

What did it mean ? Was it possible that the place of her concealment had become known, and that deliverance was close by ?

She turned from the window ; as she did so the door of the room was violently thrown open, and Owen Glendower, pale and trembling, burst into the room.

“ Measter, Measter Richard ! ” he cried, “ they be coming to search Plas Ruthven.”

For a moment there was dead silence ; then Glamorgan, who was looking steadily at Alice, said quietly,—

“ Oh, they have struck the scent at last, have they ? Well, you have only to bring them here. Mr Kingston can take back his wife.”

Glendower stared in stupefied amazement ; Alice, white as death and trembling violently, laid her hand upon Glamorgan’s arm.

“ Richard,” she cried, “ hide me away ; do not let them find me *here* ! ”

He turned and looked at her ; he took her outstretched hands, and held them in both of his.

“ Alice,” he said quietly, “ it is better they should find you here than elsewhere. Fear nothing. I am the culprit, and will bear the blame ! ”

She looked up wildly into his face, and gave a cry of pain.

“ O God ! ” she sobbed. “ Richard, will you never understand me ? I tell you I am not afraid, but I will not meet my husband ! If you have any pity for me do what I ask ; hide me, and when they come, say I am not in the house ? Richard, do you hear ? Do as I

tell you, or God alone knows what I may be tempted to do ! ”

As she spoke there was a violent knocking at the hall door. Alice, rising to her feet, gazed wildly around the room. Glamorgan did not stir ; but old Glendower, with a curious smile, crept up to the wall and opened a panel door which the original architect of the dwelling had most skilfully concealed.

“ Mistress, mistress,” he cried, “ creep in ; no soul will find thee *there*.”

Glamorgan moved as if to prevent her ; but Alice, seizing up her hat and gloves, disappeared into the dark recess and closed the panel behind her.

C H A P T E R X L V.

A L I C E S P E A K S.

THE search is over ; utter desolation reigns again in and around Plas Ruthven ; down in the dreary kitchen sits Owen Glendower, rocking himself in glee ; while in the room above his head sits the weary, heart-broken woman.

Yes, her heart has told the truth at last ; she heard her husband’s voice, and made no answer, because she dreaded being torn from the man who sits in gloomy silence by her side.

Now they are gone ; their fruitless search is ended, and Alice, unable longer to control herself, comes forth

from her hiding-place and bursts into tears. Utterly amazed, Glamorgan tries to soothe her pain ; he kisses her sunken cheek, strokes her hair, and clasps her unresisting body in his powerful arms.

"Alice," he cries, "Alice, my darling, forgive me. I never meant to pain you so."

But she cries on until her heart is eased, while his passionate kisses fall upon her face, and his tender words ring in her ears, bringing with them sorry comfort and peace.

The storm is over ; Alice's sobs have ceased. She has sipped the wine which he gave her, and has grown more composed. She has gently withdrawn herself from his arms, and sits at his feet looking up at him with weary, wistful eyes. Thus seated, she tells, not without many pauses and interruptions, the story of her long vigil.

"You always doubted me, Richard," she said, "even in the old days when we ought to have been so happy together. It used to come between us like a black shadow, so when you told me you were going away a terrible fear came over me—that that black shadow would increase and keep us apart. Do you remember how I clung to you, and asked you not to leave me ? I do, for I saw your face grow blacker and blacker and the terrible doubts increase. So I determined that you should go. I knew my love was strong enough to bear a parting, and I resolved, if possible, to root out your mistrust for ever. So you went away to China, and left me here alone.

"That is three years ago, and yet I remember it as

well as if it were yesterday, for as soon as you were gone it seemed to me as if the world had turned into a charnel house—all was so changed. For days I could do nothing but sit at home and look down upon the turrets of Plas Ruthven—dear to me because it was your home. At last I discovered a means of passing the time away. I resolved to make my wedding clothes. I grew more contented then. The days passed happily, when suddenly one night I read the account of your death! The blow came so suddenly and unexpectedly upon me that it brought me to death's door. I lay for some time hovering between life and death. But death was conquered. I rose from my bed—the mere shadow of what I once had been—to begin a life which henceforth was to be one of silent sorrow.

“To carry out the urgent wishes of my father and sister I went abroad to Troufleur, taking with me your letters, your picture, and the sad yet dear memory of the past. I had said to myself that all places would from henceforth be alike to me; but when I got to Troufleur my miseries increased tenfold.

“I walked by the sea, and seemed to hear your voice coming over the waves in agonised pain. When at night I fell into a fitful slumber, you came to my bedside. I saw the blood-stains on your face and hands, and heard you crying to me to help you. It was terrible to think that you had died so far away, without one word, one parting look. I used to lie awake at night and wonder if your poor body would ever be recovered from the sea—if it would ever lie quietly in the little graveyard, where I hoped soon to go, to my own eternal rest.”

She paused for a moment to wipe away her tears; he

bent above her, took her emaciated hand in both of his, and there she let it remain.

"Ah, yes," she continued quietly, "my sufferings were keen enough then, God knows, but I had my consolation. I thought, 'He loved me; for *my* sake he went away; for *my* sake he lost his life, and now that he has gone to a better and a happier world, he can look into my heart and read there the truth of my love.'

"By degrees this knowledge soothed me, and brought me to a better frame of mind. During the day I was soon able to appear as others did, and to reserve my grief for the solitude of my room and the silence of the night.

"At this time I met my old friend Mr Kingston. We met quite by accident; but he, seeing that I was very lonely and very ill, resolved to stay in the village to keep me company. I was glad of it. Philip and I had always been on friendly terms—and, moreover, I was anxious to atone for the part I had taken in exiling him from his home. So he remained in the village for several weeks, and we were much together. Still I was not happy, but I was growing more contented, when one day I recalled the scene which took place between you and me one Sunday on the sands. I remembered that unreasoning jealousy had made you hate the mention of Philip's name. I was about, once and for ever, to avoid the company of my old friend. I spent days and nights of misery and self-reproach, when reason stepped in and brought me again to my proper senses. I said, 'If the world misjudges me, he will not; he has gone to a place where jealousy and mistrust are not known. If he can see and judge me now—as God grant he can—he must know that my aching heart is true. Since it pleases

God that I shall live, I will try to bow my head and say, ‘Thy will be done.’ I will try to be a comfort to those who are still left to me, and when my task is done and my weary eyes may close, then my reward will be, to meet my love in heaven.”

“ You made that resolve ; why did you not keep it ?”

She raised her head and looked at him for a moment in silence. She was thinking of the story which the lawyer had told her ; of that miserable night which followed when sitting alone in her room she had held forth a packet of old letters—placed them in the fire, and watched them turn to blackened ashes in the grate. Everything faded before that vision. Glamorgan’s voice recalled her to herself.

“ Alice, have you more to tell ?”

She started, passed her hand across her eyes, and looked at him again.

“ Yes,” she said quietly, “ I have much more to tell—and before I go from here to-night I should like you to hear my story to the end.

“ My visit to Troufleurs came to a conclusion. I returned home. By this time Tregelly had grown very dear to me ; the happiest months of my life had been spent there, and everything about it reminded me of you. By day I wandered out alone, visiting the places where we had been together, and at night I lay awake listening to the dreary murmur of the sea. I was sad—so sad, but I resolutely kept back my tears, and hid my sorrow deep down in my heart for my dear father’s sake. So I laughed and chatted and sang to him when my heart was almost breaking—and while he

was quietly sleeping in his bed, I would creep up to the church to put a flower on your tomb, and kiss the cold stone which bore your name.

“The fever broke out in the village, and my father, growing fearful about my state of health, begged me to leave home. I went to Mostyn Towers. While I was there Philip asked me, for the second time in his life, to become his wife.

“I answered ‘No ; my love lies murdered in foreign seas, and when he died my heart died too—I can never marry !’ I was sorry he had asked me—sorry to have caused him pain. When he offered me his friendship I took it—he was the most generous friend I had in all the world.

“Three weeks after I returned home I heard news which brought me more sorrow than the news of your death. Mr Tremaine came down from London ; he asked for a private interview, and I, quite unsuspecting, granted his request. We met, and from his lips I learned the cruel truth !”

“The truth ?” interrupted Glamorgan.

“Yes, every word. Cold and pitiless it fell from his lips, and cut my heart in two !”

“Alice, what did he tell you ? Let me hear it, syllable for syllable.”

“He told me that I was wasting all my love and tears on a man who was another woman’s husband. He said that if the world knew my story it would bring me and mine to sorrow. He said that you, knowing yourself to be a married man, had wantonly won my love and contemplated bringing me to shame ; that my affection had tamed you and made you repent ; that you had left

me, intending to rejoin your wife, and never see me more, but that as some slight recompense for the wrong so done, you had left me some hundred pounds a-year ! ”

“ Good God ! he said that, and you believed him ? ”

“ No, Richard, I did not believe him. I could not judge you as harshly as you have judged me. I loved you far too well. I could not, would not believe it. I prayed to God on my bended knee to prove it false ; but my prayers were unheeded and my love was dumb. Sick and despairing, I met the man again, and pleaded like a beggar. I said, ‘ Deny what you have told me. I will yield up everything I have in the world if I may still believe in his truth and honour ; if you prove him false, think what it means to me, for I loved him—the knowledge of his love is the only thing which makes my life worth living ; take that away and I have not one hope left in all the world.’ But what was all that to him ? He said the truth must be told, and he told it ; he brought me undeniable proofs that Mrs Glamorgan had herself come to England to claim her rights ! I willingly gave up the money which I now considered did not rightly belong to me ; then, having done my duty, I wearily turned my face towards home.

“ How I felt God alone can tell ; it seemed to me as if all feeling had gone out of me, as if my body had been turned to senseless stone. I entered the house quietly —crept up to my room and lay down on the bed, for I was wearied out. I had not shed a tear—my grief was too deep for that ; my heart was breaking. I did not go down again that night, but when all the household were in bed, I rose and sat beside my bedroom fire. I thought over the whole story, scrutinised my own

conduct, and concluded that I had done well. Yes, there had been but one honourable course open to me—and I thanked God that I had possessed sufficient strength of mind to take it. It was clear that so long as your lawful wife was living I had no longer any right to the money which had so long been mine. I was glad I had given it up. I had also handed to the lawyer one or two presents which you had made me, requesting him to give them to your wife. He remonstrated at first, but finally I forced him to take them, and so my work with him was done.

“But now I had a heavier task before me, and I cried on God to give me strength to carry it through. I knew that if I acted wisely and well, I must from henceforth try to forget, to put the past behind me as an evil dream, and live only in the hope of a bright and happy future. I said to myself, ‘Why should I grieve? Why should I break my father’s heart, and plunge my home into bitterest sorrow for a man whose only task had been to torture me and finally bring me to shame? I have suffered enough. With God’s help, from this night forth I’ll think of him no more.’

“For a time I sat silent—pained and sorrowful, yet with a great bitterness in my heart; but the bitterness wore away, and I thought of it all with sad and sickening despair. I said, ‘I cannot choose but love him still, but I will say farewell to my love to-night, and in time, perhaps, God will help me to forget.’

“I put on a cloak, crept down to my father’s study, took the keys of the church, and noiselessly left the house. It was a calm, still night, but bitterly cold; the ground was hard with frost, but the sky was clear and brilliantly

studded with stars. It was midnight ; not a soul was abroad, and I seemed like a spirit passing silently up the hill. I reached the church : unlocked the door and entered. It was dark inside ; but I knew every inch of my way. I passed swiftly down the aisle and paused near your tomb. I knelt before it—passed my hands over it, then pressed my lips to the cold, hard stone. For a time I remained there, then stiff, cold, and weary, I rose to my feet and passed again out into the night. I locked the church door, then feeling faint and weary, I stood for a moment on the threshold. As I stood so, looking at the stars, listening to the deep murmur of the sea, there came a sound which vibrated through every nerve in my body and turned my heart deathly cold. It was a sound which I had heard just once before ; a cry—human, yet unearthly ; it was *your* voice, and it seemed to me to come from the grave. It cried,—‘Alice—my love, my love !’

“I started, trembling from head to foot. I was alone, and again all around me was intensely still. I crept round the church and among the graves, but could see nothing ; at last, more dead than alive, I stole back to my home.

“My candle still burnt on the table, my fire still smouldered in the grate. I threw off my cloak, for there was one thing more I had to do. In my drawer lay a small bundle of letters, which I had tied up with a thin crape band. I took them out : they were now the only things left to me of the past. For a moment I looked at them in hesitation—should I read them ? My heart said ‘Yes,’ but reason said ‘No.’ Reason conquered. After a while I lifted the letters and dropped them into the

flames. I watched them burn. When dawn broke I still sat there, looking upon their blackened ashes."

C H A P T E R X L V I.

"MAY YOU BE HAPPY!"

"I HAD made my resolve, and for a time at least I kept it. I did my best to help my father and sister. I took no more flowers to the church, and when I went abroad I never once allowed my eyes to wander towards Plas Ruthven. The strange turn which events had taken was perplexing to those at home ; the lawyer, for some reason of his own, asked me to keep the whole matter a secret ; and I, not wishing to speak ill of the man whom I loved so fondly, eagerly granted his request. 'My love is dead, and cannot justify himself,' I said; 'let the blame fall upon me.' So I told them nothing, except that the money, which I willingly relinquished, had gone to some one who had a greater title to it than I. Thus the days passed on wearily and sadly,—at length their tedium was broken up. One evening about the middle of last January we were all at Mostyn Towers. During the evening Philip asked me once more to become his wife !

"My first impulse was to say no. Then I thought of the story which Mr Tremaine had told me. I thought of the miseries of the past, the utter hopelessness of the future. I checked my impulse, and told him if he would come to the vicarage I would give him a final answer on the following day.

"As soon as I reached home that night I went straight to my room, and tried to make up my mind what my answer to Philip must be. At the end of half-an-hour I had come to no satisfactory conclusion ; so I went into my sister's room.

"' Marion,' I said, kneeling beside her and taking both her hands, 'I have been very cold and silent to you lately, but I mean to tell you a secret to-night. Philip has asked me again if I will marry him.'

"She looked up quickly, her face full of bright hope and joy. She stroked my hair and kissed my cheek as if I had been a child.

"' And you, Alice,' she asked, 'what did you say to him ?'

"' Nothing. I am to say yes or no when he comes here to-morrow !'

"She dropped my hands, but said nothing. Her silence was more eloquent than words. It seemed to say, —' Tell me of no more disappointments, for they make me sick and weary. Here am I striving day after day to lighten the cares of our home and to help my poor father, while you will do nothing but spend your days in self pity and in increasing the load which is already too heavy for us to bear.'

"' Marion,' I said quickly, 'what shall I do ?'

"She shook her head.

"' Do not ask me, Alice—ask your own heart ; but before you give Philip his answer to-morrow, think a little of the miseries of others as well as of your own. Think of our father growing old and grey and very weary ; think of our sad, poverty-stricken home ; and remember the only thing he asks of you is to accept the

love of a strong man's heart, and all the comfort of a wealthy home !'

"Then, without a kiss or a pressure of the hand, she wished me good-night, and I went wearily back to my room.

"All that night I did not sleep ; and in the morning I looked in my glass, and started back with a sharp shock of surprise. How changed I was ! My cheeks were pale and thin ; and my hair—which every one used to admire—was actually turning grey ! You can see my cheeks, can you not ? Well, I will show you the grey hairs !"

She took a mass of hair in her hand and held it up to him. He bent down and kissed it, but did not utter a word. Alice did not look up ; she felt the arm which was round her waist tighten convulsively, and she did not attempt to resist.

"If you had told me two years ago," she said, "that I should be grey before I was twenty, I think it would have broken my heart, yet I looked at my hair that morning without a sigh.

"At three o'clock in the afternoon Philip came, and I went down to see him. I found him in the dining-room alone. I suppose the look on my face was not very hopeful, for he took my hand in his, and spoke before I could open my lips to utter a word.

"'Alice,' he said, 'if you want more time to consider, take it, my dear, don't be in a hurry to say "No" again. I don't want to tempt you, but if you could but make up your mind to marry me, I think I might make your life much easier for you. Darling, say yes—give me the right to bring you help and comfort.'

“His kind words, the warm pressure of his hand, brought the tears to my eyes.

“Philip,’ I answered wearily, ‘it is *you*, not I, who would make a sacrifice. Remember you are both young and rich ; you could take to your home a young and happy bride—while I—what am I ? young in years perhaps, but for all that a very weary, heart-broken woman.’

“‘You are my first, my last, my only love,’ he said. ‘With you beside me, my life would be a happy one. Without you, a blank !’

“Then I did what Marion told me. I thought of our home, of my father, of all the trouble I had brought to him, of my power now to make amends. I turned again to Philip. I opened my lips to speak, but my soul rose in revolt ; try as I would I could not utter the words which would make me false to you. If I had been left to myself that day, all the future would have been changed ; yes, despite all I had heard and seen I should have remained true to myself, true to you, true to Philip. But as I stood thus, waiting to speak the word which would have parted us for ever, the door opened ; I was told a gentleman was waiting in the library to see me, and glad of the reprieve, I rushed away at once. I found that the gentleman was Mr Tremaine ; the one man in the world who had the power to urge me on to desperation. He glanced at me keenly from head to foot ; he took a small packet from his pocket and handed it to me.

“‘They are the trifles which you asked me to give to Mrs Glamorgan,’ he said ; ‘she has begged me to return them to you. She thanks you for the honourable manner in which you have behaved towards her. She

has tried to reciprocate by remaining silent ; and now she leaves England again without a moment's delay. She thinks that these trifles may be valued by you, and begged me to return them with my own hand.'

"He held the packet towards me ; I angrily thrust it aside.

"'Keep them, destroy them, do with them what you will,' I said ; 'they are of no value to me now. Besides, I have no right to possess them ; in a few months I shall be Mr Kingston's wife.'

"He started, and I thought he looked pleased. He took my hand and shook it warmly.

"'My dear young lady,' he said, 'allow me to congratulate you. You have been generous to others and just to yourself. May you be happy.'"

CHAPTER XLVII.

A CRY FROM THE GRAVE.

SHE paused again, for her companion had risen from his seat, and was now pacing excitedly up and down the room. When she paused he came towards her, and stood gazing wildly into her face.

"Alice," he said hoarsely, "why did you never tell me this before ?"

The question was a strange one ; she opened her eyes in wonder.

"Because," she answered quietly, "until a few hours ago I thought you were lying in your grave."

He shuddered.

"Ay, I forgot. I am a dead man, am I not? and I have risen from the grave for this!"

Again he sat down beside her; again he took her in his arms, kissed her pale cheek, and smoothed her silken hair.

"Oh, Alice, my love, my love," he murmured, "neither God nor man can make amends now. Fool that I was! I saw and heard, yet I would not understand. Go on, my darling; tell me all."

She sighed wearily; pressed her cold lips to his burning fingers, and said sadly,—

"I have not much more to tell. You know what happened to me that night. As soon as Mr Tremaine left the house, I went back to the dining-room. Philip was still there. I gave him my hand at once, and told him I would be his wife.

"During that evening Philip remained at the vicarage, and very bright and happy everybody seemed. My dear father, who was always gentle and good to me, was doubly so that night. Marion looked as if she had been relieved of a perfect load of care, and Philip seemed transformed into the bright, generous-hearted boy who had asked me to marry him many years before. Amidst so much gladness how could I help feeling glad? I was glad; I tried to be true, and yet, in spite of myself, my thoughts would wander to you. I felt no bitterness now, only love and pity. I said to myself, 'He never meant to injure me; he never meant to bring me pain and sorrow. I forgive him, and to-night, just for the last time, I will place a little flower upon his tomb.' I chose a moment when I was unobserved, and left the room. I went up to my

bedroom, opened a drawer, took out a wreath of immortelles, and, wrapping a warm cloak around me, stealthily left the house. It was growing late : daylight had faded, but the moon was bright. I walked quickly up the hill, through the churchyard, to the church door. There I paused. I said to myself, ‘I have no right to go there now ; my wild unreasonable passion is making me false to the living as well as the dead. I will go no further. Philip has generously placed his faith in me. I cannot love him as I ought, but I will try to be true.’ I turned from the church door, retraced some of my steps ; then, feeling weary, sat down to rest upon a tomb. The struggle was over, the victory won, and now my soul felt peaceful —peaceful as the sky above me, the air all round. But it was not ordained that either peace or happiness was ever to remain with me. Suddenly the silence of the night was broken by a sound which I had heard once or twice before ; a sound which rent my heart in two, and made my body turn cold as a stone. I heard your voice, clear and distinct, yet coming, I imagined, out of the spirit land. It cried,—

“‘Alice, come to me, my love, my love !’”

“Wild and terrified I started up and stared about me. I seemed to be alone. I staggered a few steps forward, and fainted away.

“When I recovered my senses I found I was not alone—a man stood near me ; a strange, wild-looking man, whom I had seen several times before, and whom I, in common with the villagers, knew only as the eccentric ‘Tenant of Plas Ruthven.’

“I still felt nervous, weak, and ill ; the presence of this strange old man did not serve to alleviate my fear ;

I looked at him, but could not speak, for whenever our eyes met a strange feeling came over me and kept me silent. ‘What is it?’ I asked myself again that night, but still I could not understand; a wild fascination was creeping over me, which drew my eyes to the old man’s face and rooted me to the spot. Ah, little did I know that at that moment I stood alone with my love; that I was looking into his eyes, listening to his voice; that he was not dead but living; and that his very love for me had at last transformed him into my bitterest foe!

“At length, you remember, Philip came and found us standing there, and guessing my secret sorrow, led me home without a word.

“I took Philip’s arm, for I felt too weak to walk alone, and went slowly back to the vicarage. He was evidently determined to take no notice of my strange behaviour that night. He chatted pleasantly as we went along, but I said nothing. I was still thinking of the strange encounter in the churchyard, of the pitiful cry I had heard, of the peculiar feeling which thrilled through me, as I had looked into the eyes of the strange old man. It was all a mystery which I could not understand.

“We reached the vicarage gate. Philip was about to enter, but I stopped him. An explanation of some kind was necessary, and I felt I must give it.

“‘Philip,’ I said, ‘do you know how it was you found me in the churchyard to-night?’

“He shook his head.

“‘Since you have not told me, I can’t know for certain, Alice!’ he said.

“‘Do you wish to know?’

“ ‘Not unless *you* wish it, little one.’

“ As he spoke I felt thankful that I had turned back from the church door that night ; such implicit faith and confidence deserved some slight return ; so while the impluse was on me, I hastened to tell him all. I said,—

“ ‘I went up to-night to place a fresh wreath on Richard’s tomb ; but when I reached the church door my conscience told me that such an act would make me untrue to you, and I turned away. I am doing my best to forget, but sometimes the old feeling will come over me. I loved him too well to forget him quite so soon.’

“ He took my face in both his hands, held it up and looked into my eyes.

“ ‘Alice, Alice,’ he said, ‘try as you may, you will never forget, my dear !’

“ His voice was so sorrowful, his face so sad, my heart bled for him. I had thought to bring him gladness, yet already the cloud which had darkened my life was overshadowing his.

“ ‘Do you mind, Philip ?’ I asked. And he answered sadly,—

“ ‘I will try not to mind, my dear. If I didn’t mind at all I should know I did not love you. But listen, Alice, I would sooner see you faithful than fickle, steadfast than untrue. You would not be what you are if it were possible for you to forget so soon.’

“ During the next few days the news of my engagement got whispered abroad, and while the villagers were busily discussing it, I had leisure to think over

the scene which I had helped to enact in the churchyard.

"At first I tried to forget it, but could not. Wherever I went, whatever I did, the voice was always ringing in my ears, and the eyes of the strange old man seemed to be looking into mine. What did it mean? I could not tell, but whenever I thought of the man and recalled the tones of his voice, a shudder went through me. I grew strangely nervous and ill at ease, until the strain became too great for me to bear, and my health gave way.

"I was attacked by low fever, and for several weeks confined to the house. As soon as I got better again Philip constituted himself my medical attendant, and made me keep as much as possible in the open air. He was with me every day, and while I was in his company my nervousness decreased. But the moment I was alone the memory of the past came back to me again.

"By this time I knew that the mad tenant of Plas Ruthven was strangely interested in me. I had watched his movements at first from idle curiosity, afterwards from amazement—and they were beginning to awaken in me a vague kind of alarm. I had seen him stand looking up at my bedroom window. I had seen him follow me while I was with Philip—and once I watched him pay a visit to Richard's grave. His reported madness accounted to me for his eccentricities ; his residence in Plas Ruthven seemed to account for his strange interest in me. I said to myself, 'He has heard my story ; he goes to Richard's grave because he pities him, and he thinks, alas ! that I have forgotten ! Yes, they all think that. I have looked in their faces, and I know their

thoughts as well as if they had uttered them aloud. No one pities me,—they think I am honoured, beloved, and happy ; and yet, if God was merciful, He would let me quickly close my eyes and have eternal rest !’ For I was beginning to feel so weary—and the presence in the village of that strange old man was awaking in me a fear which I could not overcome.

“The day for my wedding had been fixed, though it was not known : I had named the end of July. I was sorry now that I had delayed it so long, for I began to think that until I got away from Tregelly I should never know any peace. Besides, I began to fear that if this strain upon my nerves continued, my health, which was fast getting undermined, would utterly give way. So I did, what at another time I should have shrunk from doing,—I went to Philip and asked him if the marriage could not be hastened on. He was astonished at first ; then he looked pleased, and eagerly granted my request. We fixed upon the first of May. I felt relieved, glad, almost happy—but suddenly the memory of the past flashed across my brain, and I turned again to Philip. He was regarding me with a strange wistful look. I held out my hands, he took them—he folded me in his arms—he kissed me as a father might kiss his poor, weak suffering child. I felt I could be silent no longer. I offered him his liberty ; I held forth my hand to him, and said,—

“‘ Philip, if you wish it, take that ring from my finger—and all shall be as it was months ago ! ’

“He took my hand and held it lovingly between both his own ; he placed me in a chair by the fire ; raised my

fingers to his lips, but he let the ring remain. I tried to speak again, but he bade me be silent.

“ ‘ You are not yourself to-day, Alice,’ he said ; ‘ you are weak and ill and hysterical. We will talk about this in a few days, when you will have grown stronger.’

“ He took me home ; but left me at the vicarage door. I did not ask him to come in, for I felt I was not fit company for any one that night. I found my father and sister in the dining-room, sitting down to tea. I took my place at the table, but I could neither eat nor drink. I saw them both watching me, and I grew nervous and irritable ; later on, when my father was preparing for evening prayers, I walked out of the room. My father seemed pained, Marion angry—I took no notice of either. I went up to my room, feeling my sorrow turn to bitterness, and threw myself on my bed and tried to sleep. Presently a knock came to my door,—Marion had come to ask me to join as usual in our evening prayer. I refused. Why should I pray ? To thank God for His past mercies ? I had received none. To ask Him for happiness ? I knew it would never come ? I had been created but to suffer and endure. I could neither bring happiness to others, nor taste of it myself ; and I could not even die ! Then my bitterness passed away—for I thought of the man whom I had loved so fondly, and who I believed had left me a legacy of sorrow and shame. But I could not blame him ; ah, no, my heart would not do that ! I said, ‘ May God forgive him, as I do ; and may he never know the sorrow which I have had to bear.’

“ At the end of three days I went again to Philip and offered him his liberty.

“ ‘ Alice, do you wish it ? ’ he said.

“ I answered no, and I answered truly. To be freed from him meant to be alone in the world, wretched, deserted, unloved, with but few pleasant memories in the past, and no bright hopes for the future, a prey to morbid fancies—to have no real happiness while living and a sickening horror of death. No, I did not wish to be free, but I had suffered too keenly myself to wish to bring such sorrow and shame to the man who cared for me. But he would not accept his liberty ; our wedding day remained fixed, and we both set to work to prepare for it. Continual occupation had a beneficial effect upon me. I was beginning to look brighter, to feel more peaceful, when the horrible shadow of the past again came upon me and struck me down.”

CHAPTER XLVIII.

“ REMEMBER RICHARD GLAMORGAN ! ”

“ WE were all busy during the day, for there was a good deal to be done, but in the evening Philip came ; all the work was put away and we gave ourselves up to enjoyment. One evening we anticipated more pleasure than usual. It was my father’s birth-day, and Marion had invited some friends to spend the evening with us. Philip came much earlier than usual, and he and I sat alone before the parlour fire talking over our future plans.

“ Presently he turned, looked at me and smiled ; he

asked me to get up and stand before him that he might see me better. I did so ; he smiled again, and said,—

“ ‘I never saw you look prettier than you do to-night, Alice ; that white dress becomes you, your cheeks are flushed, and you seem quite happy. Is all this for me, or is it to honour our new acquaintance to-night ?’

“ ‘Our new acquaintance ?’ I asked. ‘Who is that ?’

“ ‘Don’t you know ?’

“ ‘No.’

“ ‘Why, your father has invited Mr Ravenscourt, the tenant of Plas Ruthven !’

“ The tenant of Plas Ruthven ! In a moment all my happiness fled, my hands trembled, and I felt my face turn white as death. The very mention of the man’s name seemed to recall the past, and deprive me of all peace in the present. As soon as I conveniently could, I ran up to my room to try and soothe my sadly irritated nerves. It was, I remember, a miserable night. The rain was falling, the wind was moaning, the sea was sighing, and the whole air seemed full of the voices of the dead. I pulled up the blind, opened the window, and looked out. I let the wind and rain play upon my face, and I listened for a moment to the weary washing of the sea. I noticed that the roads were all deserted. I looked up and down again and again, but could see no one : the company were gathering below ; in a few minutes more my absence must be noted, and I should be sought. I turned from the window with a sigh,—for I felt I would much rather be alone that night,—walked over to my dressing-table and looked at my reflection in the glass. How pale my cheeks had grown, and what a strange, wild light had come into my eyes ;

startled at the change, terrified at myself, I was about to run down to the happy company below—when an event happened which deprived me of all power of action. Something flew in at the window and fell at my feet. It was a piece of paper attached to a stone. I lifted it, pulled open the paper, and with wild palpitating heart read these words :—

‘REMEMBER RICHARD GLAMORGAN.’

“ What I did, how I felt, I don’t know ; I must have rushed out of the house, for the next thing I remember is walking up and down the rain-drenched road—with my thin white dress soaked and clinging to me—my eyes staring into the darkness, looking for I knew not what. Still the night was cold and dark and dreary ; still it seemed to me that no one was abroad ; and yet some human hand must have cast the paper into the room. I called aloud ; no one answered me. I walked up and down the road ; all was still ; then, trembling and sick at heart, I sat down, shivering and drenched with rain. Presently Philip found me. He had seen too much of late to be greatly astonished, but I felt that he was pained and grieved. He asked me what was the matter, I could not tell him ; he begged me to trust him, but I felt I could not speak to him of the terrible things which were making my life a hell. And although everything about me seemed so mysteriously dark, his love and faith in me remained unchanged. Cold, trembling, and wretched as I was, he took me back to the house, whispering words of comfort, and telling me my miseries should cease when I had become his wife.

"For several weeks I was confined to the house, almost to my bed. My sister gave out that I had taken cold, and was suffering from fever. I knew it was low nervous debility, caused by the torture I was daily made to endure, but to no living soul did I whisper the truth. All day I lay upon the bed watching the turrets of Plas Ruthven, and listening to the murmur of the sea. Now more than ever my thoughts went back to the past; now more than ever my miseries weighed upon me; for although I had tried to steel my heart, I knew that I had failed. I had engaged myself to another man, because I wished to bring some happiness to my home; and yet, despite myself, my heart still went out to the one who lay murdered in the cruel ocean. Ah, God, what I suffered! Night and day I tossed upon my bed crying to God for help, but no help came.

"I thought of that night, of the piece of paper which seemed to bring me a message from the grave. What did it mean? It was evident some one had undertaken the task of torturing me into my grave: who could it be? I could think of no one but old Owen Glendower who lived in Plas Ruthven. Yes, it must be he. The explanation satisfied me, and I resolved to think of the circumstance no more.

"Meanwhile, time wore on; my wedding day crept nearer and nearer, but my miseries increased tenfold—whenever I closed my eyes I seemed to see Richard's face, sad and strange, with the eyes gazing reproachfully into mine; every sigh of the wind seemed to bring his voice to me from far across the sea. Oh, Richard, if you had but trusted me, and come to me! You must have known what I suffered, you must have felt how I

loved you ! But I was left alone with my sorrow, and I thought you had never cared for me."

She bowed her head for a moment to wipe away the scalding tears, while he stroked her hair and kissed her hands, but never spoke a word. For a moment there was deep silence in the room ; then Alice raised her head and continued her tale.

"At the end of a week or so I was able to come out again into the village. I was very much changed, and at first my appearance startled those who saw me, but their faces were very hard,—they had no pity for me.

"I had made up my mind what I must do. I knew that so long as I remained in Tregelly I should get no peace. I resolved to ask another favour of the only man who had ever brought any happiness to me.

"I went to Mostyn Towers.

"I found Philip alone ; and once more in shame and agony I threw myself at his feet. I said, 'Philip, I have tried to forget, but I cannot ; and this agony is killing me. Will you take me away from Tregelly on the day of our marriage, and never let me see the place again ?'

"Pained and sorry as he must have felt, he never uttered a reproachful word.

"Richard, what more have I to tell ? You have heard everything, and now you know why my heart is broken."

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE LAST RECORD OF RICHARD GLAMORGAN.

“ONCE more in the silence of the night, with darkness and despair all round me, and in my heart a blacker despair than all, I try to compose my thoughts to finish the record of my life.

“Is it real, or only a dream ? Has the God, against whom I have so often blasphemed, been merciful to me, and shown me the thing I would make of myself,—the misery which I would bring upon the head of her whom I love so well ? Shall I open my eyes one calm, summer morning, look into the sweet beautiful face of my love, and say, ‘Alice, my darling, fear not for the future,—the dark devil of distrust has been plucked from my soul ; henceforth you shall be at peace !’

“Am I dead or living ? Mad or sane ? I feel my hands, and doubt my sense of touch ; I walk over to the mirror and gaze abstractedly at the vision of my face. Yes, it is true, the miracle has come to pass—the sea has given up its dead. . . .

“ . . . As Alice finished her story she drooped her gentle head, and laid it upon my breast. I folded my arms around her, but could not utter a word ; presently I looked down, and saw that she had quietly fainted away.

“I lifted her gently in my arms, carried her across the room, and laid her on the sofa. She was breathing gently, but her face was pale, her hands were as cold as clay.

"I noticed now for the first time that her dress was damp, and that the air of the room was bitterly cold ; I took off my coat and wrapped it about her, turned up the lamp which was growing dim for want of oil, and tried to kindle up the fast-dying fire ; then I returned to Alice.

"She was still cold and senseless, but breathing easily. I put some wine to her lips, I chafed her hands, I kissed her pale thin cheek ; then I sat down beside her, and began to wonder what I must do.

"Up to this I had not been able to think ; now my excitement was passing away, my brain growing clear, I could begin to look with some calmness on the future.

"What should I do ? Save her ? There was yet time. I still might restore her to the home from which I snatched her. I still might say to her husband, 'Take her ; she is good, pure, and true ; your love has been more merciful far than mine, therefore you deserve the greater happiness. I cannot undo the past, but, with God's help, I will redeem the future. Henceforth I will be to her as one who lies rotting in the sea !'

"That was clearly the course to take, but had I the strength, the power, the will ?

"I turned to Alice. She still lay motionless where I had placed her. The fire had burnt up a bit, and the air of the room seemed warmer, but my darling was cold as death. I knelt beside her, wet her lips with more wine, and took her thin white hand in mine. Then my thoughts went back to the hour when, for the first time, she had opened her eyes in this room, and looked into my face and knew me. I remembered how, with flushed cheek and outstretched arms, she had leapt from her

couch—how she had clasped her arms about my neck and kissed me, murmuring my name—and for a moment my resolution failed. But, thank God, it was only for a moment. I bent above her; then I turned away, and left Plas Ruthven.

“It was a dark, dreary night, with a thin rain falling and a cold wind blowing in from the sea. The sky was black overhead, there was neither moon nor stars. I could see nothing; instinct alone guided my footsteps across the marshes to Mostyn Towers. I staggered along like a drunken man. . . . Presently a light, glimmering like a star in the distance, told me I was nearing Philip Kingston’s house.

“I paused; I had overtaxed my strength; again my resolution was failing me. I thought, ‘When I lose my darling, what will life be to me?—a dreary blank, with no pleasant memories to dwell upon, no hope for the future; I must return, as it were, into the very shadow of the grave, and become like the restless ghosts of Plas Ruthven, living, yet dead, to all men, and beloved by one soul in all the world!’ . . . Once more my good angel conquered; it whispered, ‘Hitherto you have sinned through love; let that love, which has tortured her so cruelly, be her salvation and yours.’ I raised my tortured face to the blackened sky, and answered clearly, ‘I will! ’

“The rain was still falling, the wind still blowing bitterly, but regardless of either I resolutely rose and journeyed onward.

“I passed through the gates, up the avenue, and reached the house.

“Here all was still as death; the inmates must have

retired to rest ; but the light which had guided my footsteps across the marshes still shone brightly. I walked up to the window ; it was uncurtained ; I looked in. The room was brilliantly lit ; beside a glowing fire sat a man whom I recognised as Philip Kingston. I paused, wondering what I must do. To knock at the door and boldly ask admission would cause a commotion which must wake the whole household.

“I wanted to attract the attention of this man alone. I moved quietly from the window and looked around. I stood upon a broad gravel walk which ran round the house. Once more I approached the window ; I lifted the sash. He started, seized a revolver which lay on the chimney-piece, and pointed it at me.

“‘Who’s there ?’ he cried.

“‘Don’t fire, don’t alarm the house ; if you come quietly with me I will give you YOUR WIFE.’

‘He sprang through the window, he stood within a yard of me, staring through the darkness, but his eyes were blinded by the brilliant light of the room, and he could see nothing.

“‘Who are you, what do you mean ? For God’s sake, where is Alice ?’

“I walked quietly up to him, laid my hand upon his shoulder, and said, ‘Mr Kingston, I am Richard Glamorgan.’

“He recoiled as if a serpent had stung him. Before he could speak again, I continued,—

“You think I am a ghost or a raving madman. I am neither. It was a whim of mine to let people think me dead, but I rose from the grave several months ago. I came to Tregelly to claim my bride, and I thought I

found her false. She gave herself to you, but I believed she belonged to me. I stole her from you on your wedding day ; but I will give her back to-night.'

"I paused ; he had deprived me of the power of speech ; his hand was on my throat, the muzzle of his pistol at my head. In a hoarse voice he whispered,—

"'Villain ! tell me where she is, or I fire.'

"I pulled his hand from my throat and knocked aside the pistol so roughly that its contents were discharged in the air. There was a flash, a loud report, then dead silence. I was the first to speak.

"'Mr Kingston,' I said, 'hear me first, shoot me after if you will ; you will but do me a service. But let me speak. Before I give you your wife, answer me ;—are you willing to believe me when I tell you she is as good and as pure as she was the day you married her ?'

"'Yes, yes !' he murmured fervently ; then he added quickly, 'Where is she ? For pity's sake tell me,—take me to her.'

"I took him by the arm and I led him back to Plas Ruthven.

"We passed together through the woods, and entered the house. I unlocked the door of my study and showed him his wife.

"Yes, there she lay, pale and senseless still. Even when he bent above her, kissed her, and named her name, she did not stir. He lifted her from the couch, he folded her in his arms, and with a weary sigh she murmured—*my* name. Heart sick, soul sick, I turned away, as my darling was borne from the room !

"How slowly the hours pass on ! I sit in my room and await the morrow, wondering in a strange bewildered way what the morrow may bring forth ?

"The day has come and gone : still I sit alone and unmolested in Plas Ruthven. The story of my resurrection has spread abroad, and the excitement in the village has been considerable. The people seemed horrified, —then disgusted. They had little pity for Richard Glamorgan when dead : now that he has arisen they have none : they stare with wild, frightened eyes at the gloomy turrets of Plas Ruthven,—but their eyes fill with tears as they look towards Mostyn Towers ; for there, stricken as with the hand of death, lies the dead man's bride.

"All day I have not crossed the threshold, but Glendower, creeping sinuously through the village, has gleaned the news. He came home with his face cut and bleeding ; they guessed what work he had been doing, and set upon him like wild dogs, and drove him home. Yet here I sit unmolested. They know the Glamorgan temper better than to meddle with *me* !

"Three days have passed ; there is little for me to tell. Alice still lies at Mostyn Towers, sick almost unto death ; her father and sister are with her, and the vicarage is closed. No one has troubled me ; but the villagers, having overcome their superstitious terror, have passed quietly through the woods and gazed in wonder at Plas Ruthven. Even now they can hardly believe that the dead have risen,

"They say my Alice is dying! Yes, murdered by this hand of mine! Oh, my love, my love! to be so near and yet so far, that I may not even look upon your face.

"Little work has been done in the village to-day, for the villagers have gathered in groups, talked in whispers, and gazed with tear-dimmed eyes at the house where the poor girl lies.

"When the news of Alice's state first reached me, love overcame reason,—I left the house, determined to see her. It was the first time I had walked abroad without my disguise, and people stared at me and shrank from me as if I were a spirit newly arisen from the grave. But I took no heed,—my thoughts were only of my darling. Should I see her? God alone could tell,—they had every reason to turn me from their door. I had an ordeal before me, but I meant to brave it for Alice's sake.

"I walked straight to Mostyn Towers."

C H A P T E R L.

I N T R E M A I N E ' S O F F I C E .

"HAVING reached the house, I paused, trembling and cold, for it seemed to me that the chilly shade of death had already crossed the threshold. Most of the blinds were drawn, and there was no sign of any living soul. I approached quietly, and with trembling hands rang the bell. The door was opened immediately by a pale-looking girl, who regarded me with evident fear and

repugnance, and shrank back at my approach. I asked for Mr Kingston, and was shown at once into a room where he sat. He rose at my entrance, and a look, first of amazement, then of anger, filled his eyes.

“‘Mr Glamorgan,’ he said, ‘why are you here?’

“‘I have come to see Alice before she dies.’

“He turned away with a shudder.

“‘You have a right,’ I continued, ‘to turn me ignominiously from your door; everybody would say you had done well, and in my heart I could not blame you. But think of my sacrifice. After the battle was won I laid my treasure at your feet; and all I ask in return is to look upon her once more. . . . Mr Kingston, as you hope for mercy hereafter, grant me this one request.’

“‘I suppose,’ he answered sternly, ‘you know that you have killed her? That ought to content you, without wishing to look upon your work.’

“‘You refuse to let me see her?’

“‘I do. Her father and sister are by her bedside; therefore in that room there is no place for you!’

“I turned away, and without another word would have left the room. I suppose something in my face struck him. When I reached the door I felt his hand upon my shoulder.

“‘Stop,’ he whispered; ‘I will speak to her father. He shall judge you; I will not.’

“He passed out of the room, and I was left alone. In a few minutes he returned and told me it was Mr Chepstow’s wish that I should see his child.

“I followed him out of the room, along the passage, up a flight of stairs. I paused before an open door. Mr Chepstow and Marion had left the room, but a

servant girl lingered there, and on the bed I saw my darling. Pale as death, with her hair scattered like golden rain upon her pillow, her breath coming in short, quick pants, and her eyes wandering restlessly about the room. I approached the bedside ; I bent above her and whispered her name, and it seemed to me that my darling knew me. For she stretched forth her trembling hands, held her sweet face up to mine, and murmured,—

“ ‘There is his voice again ; I knew I should hear it, though I have waited so long. I dreamed last night that I saw him. . . . He told me he had always loved me.’ Then with a cry which rent my heart, she fell back upon her pillow, murmuring, ‘He never loved me. He went away because he never loved me ! But God must forgive him now, as I do !’

“ How long I stood beside her I don’t know. A hand was laid upon my shoulder ; I was led from the room, shown out of the house, and when I fully recovered my senses I stood alone on the marshes, with my face turned towards Plas Ruthven.

“ I have heard good news to-day ; the ecstasy has run through my veins like fiery wine. This morning I paid another visit to Mostyn Towers, and learned that my darling was better. Last night the fever turned ; she lies in an exhausted sleep, but the doctor gives hope of her recovery. They refused to let me see her, and asked me never to come to the house again. All last night, all to-day, the words which, in her delirium, Alice uttered, have been ringing in my ears. Now that she is better I will leave Tregelly for a while and go to London to have my last interview with Tremaine.

"It is over. I have seen Tremaine; I have seen Dorcas. At an early hour this morning I presented myself at Bloomsbury Square.

"The house looked dirtier and more gloomier than ever, or I was in a mood to think it so. Again I was ushered through gloomy grandeur, along gloomy passages, into a gloomy room. I had been seated there five minutes when Dorcas came in. She looked much paler than usual, much older, very haggard and worn. I was struck by the change in her, and thought she must have discovered her father's diabolical plot; but a few words undeceived me. Dorcas was ignorant, therefore was she innocent, and though I knew that she had been the main cause of all the trouble, I could not blame her. She had heard of my wild work in Tregelly, but she did not seem eager to discuss it, and I was in no mood. Hearing that Tremaine was to be found at his office, I rose to take my leave. She offered her hand; I took it. She said her 'good-bye' in a cold, clear voice, then calmly turned away.

"My mind was too full of other things to think much about Dorcas. As soon as I was clear of the house I hailed a hansom and drove to Chancery Lane. After some little difficulty I got admittance to the lawyer's room. He was seated at his table with his feet, as usual, well wrapped up in rugs. His keen eyes searched me from head to foot; he stretched forth his long thin hand, but he made no attempt to move. I overlooked his hand, drew up a chair and sat down before him.

"'Well,' he said, 'what are you here for to-day?'

"'I want your help.'

"'Of course you do; it is only when you need help I

have the pleasure of seeing you ; but let me tell you, my friend, you come this time in vain. If you have proved yourself a greater madman than you pretended to be, and are sent to gaol for your pains, it's no affair of mine.'

"'You know what I've done ?'

"'Of course I do ; who doesn't know it ? Isn't the story of the poor girl's shame on the tip of everybody's tongue ?'

"I rose from my seat and gripped him roughly by the collar.

"'Never mind the story of her shame,' I said ; 'you are mostly concerned with the story which led to it.'

"His little, cruel eyes glistened fiercely as they fixed themselves upon me ; he half shrank away.

"'What do you mean ?' he said.

"'This : you have made my jealousy a cloak for your devilry ; you have struck through my hand at the life of a helpless girl, and so compassed her destruction. Yes, you have done your work well. Now I mean to hear from your own lips whether or not you had any foundation for the story you told Miss Chepstow.'

"With a mighty effort he shook himself free of my grasp and pulled violently at the bell.

"'Leave my office !' he shrieked, 'or I'll have you turned out and summoned for assault.'

"I smiled and shrugged my shoulders ; I knew I had might as well as right on my side.

"'Do your worst,' I said, 'and I'll do mine. Do what I ask and I'll never expose you ; refuse me, and as sure as there is a God above us I strangle you where you stand! . . . Summon assistance ; give me up ! I tell you I am ready to die for you !'

"I paused, for a clerk, in answer to the violent summons, entered the room. Tremaine, white with passion, stared at me, stared at him, hesitated, and finally dismissed him. When he was gone I resumed my seat, and Tremaine returned to the table.

"'So,' he said, with a sneer, 'you will strangle me, will you? You will tell the world the part I have played. Now I wonder who would believe the word of a man who, for the last six months or more, has given himself out as a madman, and who has really been mad enough to do what you have done?'

"'If they doubted my word, they would believe Miss Alice Chepstow. Your daughter would believe *me*.'

"I saw I had struck the right chord at last; his hand trembled, his face went white as death.

"'What do you want me to do?'

"'First tell me, whether you had the slightest foundation for the story you told?'

"Tremaine hesitated; then he seemed to remember that we were alone, and that an admission made without witnesses was the same as no admission at all. So he said,—

"'I had no foundation. I did it to hurry on her marriage, which I thought would cure you of your infatuation, and make a sane man of you again. And now that you are satisfied, go.'

"He pointed to the door, but I made no attempt to move. I had been satisfied before; what I wanted was a proof to satisfy my darling. So I spoke.

"'Put what you have said to me on paper; hand the paper to me, and I promise to leave you in peace.'

"He stared, gasped as if for breath, and clenched his hand.

"Leave my office!" he cried, but I made no attempt to move.

"When you have given me that paper, I will; not before."

He rose, paced excitedly up and down the room. He reached forth his hand towards the bell; but this time he did not pull it—he opened a cupboard and helped himself to some brandy. Then he turned again to me.

"What do you want the paper for?" he asked.

"To show to Miss Chepstow."

"Damn her!"

"Tremaine," I said, "when Alice first told me of the part you had played, I cursed you from the bottom of my heart. Since then I have learned to be more merciful. You have destroyed me, because you have destroyed the one woman who is all the world to me; but I suppose you did it for Dorcas' sake. Alice is dying; let me clear myself to her before she goes, and I'll try to forget and forgive. I saw Dorcas this morning. I soon found that she knew nothing of this story, for her faith in you and her love for you was what it had always been. I said to myself while I looked in her eyes, "If he shows mercy, mercy shall be shown to him, for she shall never know."

I paused, but he said nothing. He had returned to his seat by the table, and had dropped his head upon his hands. Presently he moved, drew a paper towards him, wrote hastily on it, and handed it to me. It was the recantation which I sought.

I looked at him; he pointed to the door. Without another word I left him."

C H A P T E R L I.

P A S S I N G A W A Y .

“ LEAVING Tremaine, I came straight back to Plas Ruthven. I had determined, come what might, to see Alice once again. I found that she had left Mostyn Towers and lay at the vicarage ; the cause of this change was a mystery to me, which no one seemed able to interpret.

“ This morning I left Plas Ruthven and walked up to the vicarage.

“ I had the paper in my pocket, and as I went I made a vow to myself that when once her eyes had rested on that document, when once she was convinced of the real truth, I would leave England and never again seek to behold my darling’s face.

“ I reached the vicarage, rang the bell, and was admitted by the girl who, in the old days, used to welcome me with such a bright smile. But now her face was grave and pale ; she shrank a little from me, as everybody seems to do now, and when I asked for Alice, answered in strange hesitation. She did not know if I could see her ; she would ask Miss Chepstow. So she tripped away and left me in the hall.

“ Presently she returned with the message, ‘ Miss Alice was better, but could not be disturbed ! ’

“ They seem determined to keep me from my love. I have called four times at the vicarage, always with the same result.

“ The girl does not go for her message now : she has it ready, ‘ Miss Alice can see no one.’

“ What shall I do, what must I do ?—I have written Marion an appealing letter, which lies open before me. Shall I send it ?—and if I do, will it bring to me a first, last sight, of my darling ?

“ I have seen her ; yes, once again I have seen her. I thank thee, my God !

“ This morning, as I sat with the letter which I had written to Marion still lying before me, Glendower came to me, bringing a note which had been sent down from the vicarage. I opened it, and read as follows :—

“ ‘ MR GLAMORGAN,—My sister has asked for you three times ; therefore, since it is her own ardent wish, and since a refusal might have sad results, I have determined to let her see you, if you will come here.

‘ MARION CHEPSTOW.’

“ I crushed the letter in my hand, and two minutes later was walking with long strides towards the vicarage.

“ Scarcely had my hand touched the bell when the door was opened. Without a word the girl admitted me, led me along the well-known passage, and, after a gentle tap, opened the dining-room door. I paused with beating heart and stifled breath, and fixed my eyes upon —Alice.

“ She was wrapped in shawls and furs, and she lay upon a sofa which was drawn up to the windows. Her eyes were not wild and wandering as they had been before, but full of recognition ; and yet, ah, God ! I knew that death was extending towards her his cruel, pitiless arms.

“When the door opened she turned her head, uttered a cry of joy, and held out both her hands. What I did, God knows ; when I recovered my senses, as it were, I found that I was kneeling by the sofa holding my darling in my arms. Her hair fell in a golden shower upon my shoulder, her hand clasped my neck, and her sweet face, now bathed in tears, was held up to mine.

“‘So you have really come ; it is no vision, it is all true !’ she said. ‘I began to think I had been dreaming, for I lay here day after day, looking at the hills and the sea, listening for your footstep, and you never came.’

“I kissed her sweet face, and laid her back upon her pillows, but I still held her hands in mine.

“‘Alice,’ I said, ‘I have no right to come to you now, my darling—for on that night when I gave you back to your husband, I knew that if I followed the right course I should never see you again. I intended to leave Plas Ruthven—you fell ill, and I could not leave. I called at Mostyn Towers, they let me see you ; and some words of yours, uttered in your delirium, told me my work was not yet done. My love, my little love,’ I murmured, stroking her golden hair, ‘I have been pitiless, cruel, unjust ; but, as God is my judge, I was always true to you !’

“I took from my pocket the paper which Tremaine had given me, and handed it to her ; she read it quietly, and as she did so her cheek grew paler and paler. Then she refolded it and handed it back to me, murmuring as she did so,—

“‘May God forgive him ! may God forgive you both.’

“She put her hands in mine, and laid her fair head on my shoulder.

"After all," she murmured, "God has been just. If I have suffered, He gives me my reward. They are all so good and kind to me . . . and you have come back ,

"She lay for a time peacefully in my arms, then the door opened and Marion entered. She took her seat beside Alice, and intimated to me that our interview had better close.

"But you must come again to-morrow," said Alice, and with those words ringing in my ear, I departed.

"Every day I go to the vicarage; every day I sit for hours holding my darling in my arms, for it is only while lying so that she seems at rest.

"But every day I notice her cheek looks paler and thinner, her eyes less lustrous. My love is passing away.

"I noticed one day that she wore no wedding ring, and asked her about it.

"She smiled.

"Philip took it off," she said, "the day I told him I still loved *you*. Ah, he has been very good to me. I used sometimes to wish that I could love him, but God willed it otherwise, you see. . . ,"

"Alice is dying,—yes, while the summer is coming on, while all things are brightening and quickening into life, my love is fading away. I have watched her day by day, hour after hour. I have seen death creep nearer and nearer, till at last his blighting breath has touched her cheek.

"Yet but now, with her dear eyes growing dim, and her senses fading, she grasped my hand and murmured,—

“‘Dear Richard, it is better so. I am happy, quite happy, for I know you will always love me, and you will come to me some day . . . and you will never doubt again! . . .’”

CHAPTER LII.

THE LAST WORDS OF RICHARD GLAMORGAN.

“IT is a warm midsummer night, the heavens are brightly illuminated with both moon and stars.

“While the clock in the church steeple chimed twelve, I stood in the graveyard over yonder, gazing upon a small white marble cross, and repeating the words which I knew to be written thereon :

A L I C E,
WHO FELL QUIETLY TO SLEEP
ON THE 30TH OF JUNE 186—,
IN THE 20TH YEAR OF HER AGE.

“I kissed the cold white stone, for none could see.
I murmured the name of my love, for none could hear.
Then, weary and heart-broken, I descended the hill, and crept again into the dreary shadow of Plas Ruthven.”

THE END.

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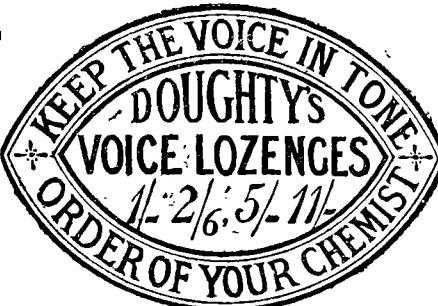
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